

# Recollection and Confession:

The Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory  
in the Dutch Reformed Church, 1862-1963

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## **Declaration**

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism as site of memory in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in the period 1862 to 1963. It assumes that there is a dynamic entanglement between recollection and confession as sources of identity in Reformed communities. To put it differently: how a community remembers confessional documents plays a role in how it confesses and embodies its faith at a particular point in time and what it means for them to do so. The study examines and explicates the characteristics and effects of this entanglement in the history of the DRC.

The main questions that the study sets out to answer are as follows: How was the Heidelberg Catechism remembered by the DRC between 1862 and 1963? What stimulated the DRC's commemoration of the Catechism? How did memories of the Catechism influence the DRC's confession and embodiment of its faith? What collective shared knowledge did the DRC express by way of the Catechism?

To answer these questions, archival material from newspapers and journals from the period is studied through the theoretical lens "site of memory." The aim is to identify the *places* and *instances* where the DRC's memory of the Heidelberg Catechism was formed, expressed and crystallised. Therefore, instead of being interested in exactly what happened during any particular event involving the Heidelberg Catechism or what the outcome was, the driving question is rather why the Heidelberg Catechism is relevant to an event at all. Or to give another example: instead of asking whether the DRC's memory of the Heidelberg Catechism was correct or not, the focus is on *how* it was remembered and what kind of identity construction this memory facilitated.

The body of the study consists of four chapters.

Chapter 2 analyses and discusses the Heidelberg Catechism as a pivotal aspect of the so-called Liberal Struggle of the 1860s. It provides a short overview of the theological context of the 1860s and focuses on the "outbreak" of the Liberal Struggle at the synod of 1862 as a result of a remark about the Heidelberg Catechism by one of the members of the synod. It shows that the preservation of the Reformed heritage was closely connected to the Heidelberg Catechism for both sides of the conflict, and accordingly explicates the different understandings of tradition that are at the heart of this theological conflict.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of the Heidelberg Catechism in the infamous Du Plessis case of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In this controversy, the Catechism had a subtler presence than was the case in the theological conflicts of the 1860s. However, it is argued

that the memory of the Liberal Struggle had a defining influence on how the Du Plessis case was framed and eventually concluded.

Chapter 4 deals with the 1930s and 1940s as a period in which the DRC was faced with social problems specifically caused by widespread poverty and urbanisation. The time was depicted as one of decline and deterioration. The chapter discusses how the DRC responded to the zeitgeist by defining itself as a *confessional* church. It also shows how a “return to the past” functioned as a point of stability and orientation and how “heritage” as a concept became a central aspect in the DRC’s identity construction. In defining its heritage, the DRC merged various aspects of its past into one narrative, including Reformed Confessions, Protestant history, Dutch history and South African history.

Chapter 5 investigates and explicates the close link between commemoration and identity. It delves deeper into the *return of history* that started in the mid 1930s, and discusses the DRC’s concern with *how* its past was remembered and ritualised. The specific memories of the Heidelberg Catechism between 1948 and 1963 are also discussed and analysed, with special attention being paid to the 400<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1963. In the final section the unification of the five DRC synods is discussed as an event supposedly following from a shared confessional basis but shown to be clearly influenced by the DRC’s commemorative practices.

## OVERZICHT

Deze studie is een analyse van de Heidelbergse Catechismus als een plaats van gedachtenis binnen de *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) voor de periode van 1862 tot 1963. De studie stelt voorop dat er een dynamische correlatie bestaat tussen gedachtenis en belijdenis als bronnen van identiteit binnen gereformeerde gemeenschappen. Met andere woorden: de manier waarop een gemeenschap zich haar belijdenisgeschriften herinnert, speelt een rol in de manier waarop ze haar geloof belijdt en beoefent, alsook de waarde die ze daaraan hecht. De studie onderzoekt en verduidelijkt de kenmerken en de gevolgen van deze correlatie op de geschiedenis van de NGK.

De studie beoogt om de volgende essentiële vragen te beantwoorden: Hoe werd de Heidelbergse Catechismus door de NGK herinnerd tussen 1862 en 1963? Welke factoren stimuleerden de gedachtenis van de Catechismus door de NGK? Welke invloed hadden herinneringen aan de Catechismus op de geloofsbelijdenis binnen de NGK? Welke gemeenschappelijke kennis werd door de NGK gepredikt door middel van de Catechismus?

Om deze vragen te beantwoorden, wordt archiefmateriaal van kranten en dagbladen van deze periode bestudeerd met een theoretische lens “plaats van gedachtenis”. Het doel van de studie is om plaatsen en instanties te identificeren waar de gedachtenis van de Heidelbergse Catechismus door de NGK werd gevormd, uitgedrukt en gekristalliseerd. In plaats van te achterhalen wat er precies gebeurde tijdens één of andere gebeurtenis waarbij de Heidelbergse Catechismus betrokken was, is de hoofdvraag eerder als de Heidelbergse Catechismus in de eerste plaats van belang was bij de gebeurtenis of niet. Of om nog een ander voorbeeld te stellen: in plaats van zich af te vragen of de gedachtenis van de Heidelbergse Catechismus binnen de NGK al dan niet correct is, ligt de nadruk eerder op *hoe* die herinnerd wordt en aan welke vorm van identiteit deze gedachtenis vorm geeft.

De studie bestaat uit vier hoofdstukken:

Hoofdstuk 2 analyseert en bespreekt de Heidelbergse Catechismus als een cruciaal onderdeel van de zogenaamde Liberale Strijd in de jaren 1860. Het geeft een kort overzicht van de theologische context van de jaren 1860 en het gaat in op de oorsprong van de Liberale Strijd tijdens de synode van 1862, in verband met een opmerking van één van de leden van de synode over de Heidelbergse Catechismus. Het toont aan dat de bewaring van het gereformeerd erfgoed voor de beide partijen van het conflict nauw

samenhang met de Heidelbergse Catechismus. Het verduidelijkt eveneens de verschillende opinies over traditie, die aan de grondslag liggen van dit theologisch conflict.

Hoofdstuk 3 handelt over de rol van de Heidelbergse Catechismus in de beruchte zaak Du Plessis van de late jaren 1920 en begin 1930. In deze controverse speelde de Catechismus een meer subtiele rol dan bij de theologische conflicten van de jaren 1860. Het staat echter buiten kijf dat de nagedachtenis van de Liberale Strijd een cruciale invloed had op het verloop van de zaak Du Plessis en de uiteindelijke afhandeling ervan.

Hoofdstuk 4 beschrijft de jaren 1930 en 1940 als een periode waarin de NGK moest afrekenen met sociale problemen die specifiek veroorzaakt werden door wijd verspreide armoede en verstedelijking. Het was een tijdperk van verarming en teloorgang. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt hoe de NGK reageerde op de “zeitgeist” en zich aldus profileerde als een *confessionele* kerk. Het toont aan dat een “terugkeer naar het verleden” functioneerde als een teken van stabiliteit en oriëntering; alsook hoe “erfgoed” een cruciaal aspect werd in de opmaak van de identiteit van de NGK. In de definitie van haar erfgoed bracht de NGK verschillende aspecten van haar verleden onder één noemer, waaronder hervormde belijdenissen, protestantse geschiedenis, Nederlandse geschiedenis en Zuid-Afrikaanse geschiedenis.

Hoodstuk 5 onderzoekt en verduidelijkt het nauw verband tussen herdenking en identiteit. Het gaat dieper in op de *terugkeer van de geschiedenis*, die begon in het midden van de jaren 1930. Het bespreekt hoe de NGK belang stelde in *hoe* haar verleden werd herinnerd en geritualiseerd. Verder worden ook de specifieke herinneringen van de Heidelbergse Catechismus tussen 1948 en 1963 besproken en geanalyseerd; speciale aandacht wordt besteed aan de 400<sup>ste</sup> herdenking van de Heidelbergse Catechismus in 1963. In de laatste sectie wordt de vereniging van de vijf NGK synoden besproken. Alhoewel deze gebeurtenis zogenaamd voortvloeide uit een gezamenlijke confessionele basis, werd het toch duidelijk beïnvloed door de herdenkingsprincipes van de NGK.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and methodological overview

### 1.1. Introduction

This study is an analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in the period 1862 to 1963. It presupposes that the Heidelberg Catechism was one among many sites of memory of the DRC in the period, and that these sites served as dynamically entangled sources of identity for the DRC. The study examines and explicates the characteristics and effects of this entanglement in the history and identity of the DRC.

In this introductory chapter, an outline of the research project is given. Firstly, the aim and relevance of the study is sketched, followed by, secondly, a description of the methodology, research questions and an explanation of the periodisation. The main theoretical cornerstones of the study are then outlined and briefly described. Thereafter, an overview of the Heidelberg Catechism in the life of the DRC is presented, followed by some preliminary remarks that ought to be kept in mind throughout the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the various chapters that are to follow.

### 1.2. The aim and relevance of the study

In 2013, the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism was celebrated in various Reformed communities all over the world. The event stimulated renewed interest and research about this internationally influential document.<sup>1</sup> Reformed communities and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example K. Apperloo-Boersma & H.J. Selderhuis (eds.). 2013. *Power of Faith: 450 years of the Heidelberg Catechism*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Huijgen, Arnold. (ed.). 2013. *The spirituality of the Heidelberg Catechism. Papers of the international conference on the Heidelberg Catechism held in Apeldoorn 2013*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Bierma, Lyle D. 2013. *The theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. A Reformation synthesis*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; Payne, Jon D. & Heck, Sebastian (eds.). 2013. *A faith worth teaching. The Heidelberg Catechism's enduring heritage*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books; Ernst-Habib, Margit. 2013. *But why are you called a Christian? An introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*. Göttingen: Van denhoeck & Ruprecht; Heimbucher, M., Schneider-Harpprecht, C. & Siller, A. (eds.). 2012. *Zugänge zum Heidelberger Katechismus: Geschichte-Themen-Unterricht*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie; Freudenberg, M. & Siller, A. (eds.). 2012. *Was ist dein einziger Trost? Der Heidelberger Katechismus in der Urfassung*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie; Schwier, H. & Ulrichs, H.G. (eds.). 2012. *Nötig zu wissen: Heidelberger Beiträge zum Heidelberger Katechismus*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter; Plasger, G. 2012. *Glauben heute mit dem Heidelberger Katechismus*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

academic circles in South Africa were no exception<sup>2</sup> and this research project, too, resulted from this commemoration.

The widely celebrated anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism presented me with an opportunity to combine my foremost theoretical-philosophical interest – memory – with a topic that has to a large extent dominated my life as member of a specific religious community: Reformed confessions.<sup>3</sup>

Commemorations are, of course, not without ambiguity. They are demonstrations of the pliability of memory par excellence. It is this realisation that shaped the methodology and theoretical underpinnings of this study. Struck by the questions that were asked in preparation for this commemoration in South African Reformed circles, the audiences and groups assumed to have an interest in the event, together with the excitement or lack thereof among members of Reformed communities, I became curious about the ways the Reformed community to which I belong – the Dutch Reformed Church – might have commemorated the Heidelberg Catechism in the past. My curiosity was further piqued when I noticed a relative indifference about the Heidelberg Catechism among members of the DRC who were otherwise deeply divided and consumed by a more contemporary confessional document: the Belhar Confession (1986).

The reception of the Heidelberg Catechism is an issue of special concern to the South African society, and the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches in particular. Reformed churches have had a significant if divisive influence in South Africa's past and Reformed identity remains a contested entity. It can be argued that Reformed confessions are at the heart of the South African Reformed identity struggle.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Van Tonder, H. & Vosloo, R. 2014. *Remembering the Heidelberg Catechism in Southern Africa today*. Acta Theologica Supplement 20; Van Tonder, H. (ed). 2013. *Sewe stories en 'n stock cube. Die Heidelbergse Kategismus se troos vir vandag*. Wellington: Bybelkor; Smit, D.J. 2013. "Vervreemding en gawe – sleutelmotiewe in die Heidelbergse Kategismus." *NGTT* 54 (1&2): 173-188; and a special edition of the journal *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 2013, 47:2 containing several academic articles on the Heidelberg Catechism.

<sup>3</sup> The draft version of the Belhar Confession came into being in 1982 and was officially accepted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (later the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa) in 1986 – the year in which I was born. At the time, this confessional document served as a significant theological confrontation to the DRC and continues to do so to this day. The DRC's struggle to come to grips with the meaning of the Belhar Confession for South Africa ever since, and particularly in the aftermath of Apartheid, is a contentious matter both amongst members of the DRC and between the DRC and the URCSA on a micro and macro level.

### 1.3. Hypothesis and research questions

The nature and role of confessions in Reformed communities are not easy to pin down. Apart from the fact that the Reformed tradition has never had a fixed confessional basis, it is also argued that a distinctively new era in Reformed confessions came into being with the Barmen declaration. A lot has been written about this topic in South African Reformed circles, particularly in relation to the Belhar Confession and its reception in Reformed churches.

We can differentiate at least three different types of discussions about Reformed confessions. First, Reformed confessions can be discussed theologically. In these types of discussions, the focus is on the content of confessions, their biblical grounding, and their (theological) meaning.

It can also be discussed ecclesialogically. These discussions focus on the place of confessions in the Reformed tradition and the ecclesial authority connected to it, together with its place in Reformed church orders.

Thirdly, Reformed confessions can be discussed from a historical point of view. Historical discussions, in turn, are concerned with several things. First, the context in which a confession came into being is important. It asks about the role players, the theological issues that were at stake, and why there was a need to confess the old faith anew. Historical discussions are also concerned with the reception process of confessions: “How did a specific document come to attain the status of confession?” and “How did a specific denomination’s confessional basis come into being?” Thirdly, historical analyses of confessions focus on the memory of confessions. These questions focus on the ways in which confessions are remembered by specific communities.

It is not possible or desirable, of course, to completely separate these different discussions from one another. It is exactly because these different aspects of confessions are deeply intertwined that we ought to ask all these questions about it. The theological meanings, the ecclesiological specifics, and the historical contexts all work together to constitute confessions in the Reformed tradition.

This enmeshed reality of confessions informs the main hypothesis of this study: a community’s identity is constituted by different dynamically entangled sites of memory, and a confessional document can be one such site. This means that, for a community, the meaning of a confession is influenced by how it remembers the confession, and also by the other elements that constitute its collective memory. For this study, the focus is on a specific Reformed confession and a specific community: the Heidelberg Catechism and the Dutch Reformed Church.

With this hypothesis in mind, the study sets out to answer the following questions:

- How was the Heidelberg Catechism remembered in South Africa between 1862 and 1963?
- What stimulated the commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism during this period?
- How did the memory of the Heidelberg Catechism influence the way in which the DRC confessed and embodied its faith during this period?
- What other memories shaped the collective memory of the DRC in the period?
- How does the memory of the Heidelberg Catechism relate to other aspects of the DRC's collective memory?
- What are the main mnemonic characteristics of the DRC during this period?

## 1.4. Methodology and periodisation

The methodology to answer these questions consists of two aspects. The first aspect is the gathering of relevant archival material. The Dutch Reformed Church's archive in Stellenbosch together with the Africana sections of the libraries of both the University of the Free State and Stellenbosch University were consulted.

Given the focus on the Heidelberg Catechism and its commemorations, the research started off by focusing on the main commemoration dates of the Heidelberg Catechism in the history of the DRC. The DRC first constituted as an autonomous church in 1824, which makes 1863 the first "big" commemoration date of the Heidelberg Catechism in its history as an officially constituted community. The other dates included in this approach are 1913 and 1963. To narrow down the scope of the study, it was decided not to include 2013. The period of the study was thus (initially) fixed as 1863 to 1963.<sup>4</sup>

The first step was to gather material related to official commemorations of the 300<sup>th</sup>, 350<sup>th</sup> and 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. For this, I consulted agendas and minutes of synodical meetings held around this time, and theological newspapers and journals: *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (later *Die Kerkbode*), *De Onderzoeker*, *De Gereformeerde Maandblad*, *Die Ou Paaie*, *Het Zoeklicht* (later *Die Soeklig*), and *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* (later *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*). From these sources, it appeared that the anniversaries were not commemorated in very official ways in the DRC.

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in chapter 5, 1963 is also an important date in the history of the DRC as it marks the event of the *reunification* of the DRC.

Despite the lack of official commemorations, this initial consultation of sources showed that the Heidelberg Catechism was a prominent topic in the DRC's discourses throughout the period. A good example of this is the role that the Heidelberg Catechism played at the synod of 1862, and accordingly in the so-called Liberal Struggle that ensued in its wake (see chapter 2). Because of this event, the official periodisation of the study was adjusted to the period 1862 to 1963.

This led to a second consultation of the abovementioned sources, this time gathering material dealing directly or indirectly with the Heidelberg Catechism – with special attention to incidences where the Heidelberg Catechism became particularly prominent or where it was suspiciously and uncharacteristically absent. Other prominent sources consulted during this phase of archival research includes *De strijd onzer vaderen tegen het liberalisme* (1898) by A. Dreijer, Johannes du Plessis's biography of Andrew Murray, *Het leven van Andrew Murray* (1919), *Eeuwfeest-album van de Nederduits Gereformeerde-Kerk in Zuid-Afrika 1824-1924* (1924) by A. Dreyer, *Koers in die Krisis* (three volumes, edited by H.G. Stoker and F.J.M. Potgieter), and *Die Tien Gebooie. Populêre en praktiese stigtelike verklaring aan die hand van die Heidelbergse Kategismus* (1947) by E.E. van Rooyen.

The second consultation of sources revealed two early discoveries about the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory: first, in the memory of the DRC the Heidelberg Catechism is often grouped together with the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt as the Formulae of Unity to function as a rhetorical unit (see 1.7 for comments on this phenomenon); second, the Heidelberg Catechism is not only a site of memory but also a site of forgetting.

The second aspect of the methodology is the theoretical framework with which the research questions are approached.<sup>5</sup> As indicated in the title, “site of memory” is the key theoretical concept of this study. What does this concept mean and how does it help us to answer the research questions that are set out?

This assumes, firstly, that the Heidelberg Catechism is part of the collective memory of the DRC and informs its identity. Secondly, the research project assumes that by studying

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<sup>5</sup> My own interest in history is largely informed by the work of Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, history, forgetting* (2004). Ricoeur's thinking about the relation between memory, history and forgetting, together with his views on the epistemology of historical knowledge cultivated my affection for the question of temporality: what it means to be temporal beings; how the past, present and future are connected through memory; and how identity and memory are intertwined.



and analysing the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory one would learn something about the formation of the DRC's identity.

This point of departure means that certain kinds of questions are asked when analysing archival sources. Instead of being interested in exactly what happened during any particular debate about the Heidelberg Catechism or what the outcome was, the question is rather why the Heidelberg Catechism was relevant in the debate at all, for example. Or to give another example: instead of asking whether the DRC's memory of the Heidelberg Catechism was correct or not, the focus is on *how* it was remembered and what kind of identity construction this memory facilitated.

## 1.5. Theoretical cornerstones of the study

As explained above, the Heidelberg Catechism is posited as a site of memory in order to analyse the memory of a specific community – the DRC. This assumes that a group has memories – that there is something like collective memory that can be distinguished from individual memory. But what exactly is a site of memory, and how is this related to collective memory?

### 1.5.1. *Site of memory*

The concept, site of memory (or *lieu de mémoire*), was initially popularised by the seminal seven-volume work edited by Pierre Nora,<sup>6</sup> *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, published in France between 1984 and 1993. Nora's work is a very specific historical interpretation and critique of the French cultural life. Despite the fact that Nora's work is seen as laying the foundation for this type of analysis,<sup>7</sup> his own use of the concept *lieu de mémoire* is criticised for its lack of theoretical coherence and the way in which it makes the nation, and specifically the Western European nation, the soul carrier of memory (Misztal, 2003: 104). Nevertheless, the concept has proved to be influential and fruitful and has since developed a life of its own. Scholars use it without necessarily following Nora's project. As a result, later developments in the theory and application of *lieu de mémoire* differ from Nora's project in various ways.

A good example of this is *Het Gerformeerde Geheugen* by Harinck, Paul and Wallet (2009).<sup>8</sup> In this study of Dutch Reformed Protestants, they have persuasively shown that applying sites of memory to religious concepts and groups – particularly Protestant

<sup>6</sup> Nora, however, gives credit to Frances Yates for the concept used in her influential book, *The Art of Memory* (1966). Yates discusses "memory places" – an aspect of an important tradition of mnemonic techniques whereby memory would be practiced by a systematic inventory of *loci memoriae*.

<sup>7</sup> Nora is also seen as an influential player in establishing the *memory boom* experienced since the 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> An earlier study with a similar focus was published by the same group of editors 2004, *De Reformatie-herdenking van 1917. Historische beeldvorming en religieuze identiteitspolitiek in Nederland*.

groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century – are indeed productive. They argue that a religious appeal on the past plays a crucial role in how religious groups view(ed) themselves, how they relate to other groups and how they develop(ed) over time (Harinck, Paul & Wallet, 2009: 12).<sup>9</sup>

For the purpose of this study, I will use Jay Winter's definition of site of memory:

Sites of memory are places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express 'a collective shared knowledge ... of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and individuality is based.' The group that goes to such sites inherits earlier meanings attached to the event, as well as adding new meanings. Such activity is crucial to the presentation and preservation of commemorative sites. When such groups disperse or disappear, sites of memory lose their initial force, and may fade away entirely ... Such sites of memory are topoi with a life history. They have an initial, creative phase, when they are constructed or adapted to particular commemorative purposes. Then follows a period of institutionalisation and routinisation of their use (Winter, 2010: 312).

Although Winter's definition is focused on physical places, for Nora (and others using the concept), "sites" do not only refer to physical places but also to concepts, expressions, symbols, persons, and days of commemoration. It is, of course, in this more abstract way that this study, too, will define the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory.

The important characteristic of sites of memory that Winter's definition highlights is the fact that a group's identity is as much shaped by a site of memory as it itself shapes the contours of the site. Meaning is inherited as well as added. Moreover, a site eventually ceases to exist if a group no longer engages with it. This points to an important difference between the history of a group and its sites of memory. History is removed from its subject; its legitimacy resides in the fact that it takes a step back and aims for objectivity. History can be studied and analysed by outsiders. Although sites of memory, too, can be analysed by outsiders, it cannot exist as a *thing* once subjective engagement with it has come to an end. Memory, and the sites it constitutes, is *alive*, intimate and existential in a way that history is not.

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<sup>9</sup> The memory work in *Het Gereformeerden Geheugen* is done from the following three premises: firstly, "lieux de mémoire" is not used in an undifferentiated manner, but used so as to understand what *forms* memory takes on; secondly, methodological individualism is favoured which implies that changes and continuities in social or collective memory is understood at the hand of the opportunities, motives and interests of the individuals who "produce" and "consume" memories; thirdly, the work traces the *functions* assigned to memories, both by leaders and those groups that accepts the leaders and their identity-politics (Harinck et al 2009: 12).

Moreover, the idea that in sites of memory memory is somehow concrete and material allows us to study a concept that can otherwise become vague and mythical.

### 1.5.2. Collective memory

#### 1.5.2.1 Maurice Halbwachs

The concept of “collective memory” is mainly attributed to the work of the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). In his three texts, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925, “The Social Frameworks of Memory”, partially translated in *On Collective Memory*, 1992), *La mémoire collective* (published posthumously in 1950 and translated as *The Collective Memory* in 1980), and *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte* (1941, “The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land”, partially translated in *On Collective Memory*, 1992) he argued that memory is specifically a social phenomenon (Whitehead, 2008: 2223-2225).<sup>10</sup>

Halbwachs’ conceptualisation of collective memory draws on the work of Emile Durkheim who argues that “every society displays and requires a sense of continuity with the past” (Misztal, 2003: 4) and that this continuity gives rise and expression to a collective identity. In this spirit, collective memory is seen as “shared social frameworks of individual recollections” (Misztal, 2003: 4). Halbwachs stressed that “the coherence and complexity of collective memory tend to correspond to coherence and complexity at the social level and that this seemingly individual capacity is really a collective phenomenon” (4).

At the time of its publication, Halbwachs’ work was pioneering because of its claim that memory was a social phenomenon over against the general idea that remembering was a solitary act and an individual experience – an idea widely spread in the writings of William Wordsworth (Whitehead, 2008: 2229-2231). Also the work of Henri Bergson, of whom Halbwachs was a student, and Sigmund Freud is part of this stream of thought.<sup>11</sup> Although Halbwachs came to reject Bergson’s individualistic philosophy in favour of

<sup>10</sup> The Kindle edition of Whitehead’s book was used. The numbers in brackets therefore refers to locations in the electronic text, and not to page numbers.

<sup>11</sup> Despite Halbwachs unambiguous refutation of Bergson’s work, Whitehead argues that “Bergson’s ‘habit memory’ also provides an essential element in the elaboration of collective memory, and helps to conceptualise its transmission” (Whitehead, 2008: 2253-2255). This forms part of the bigger argument that the idea of collective memory is not as novel as it is often claimed, but that it is part of the long tradition of memory work. Even “Wordsworth’s recollections were triggered by place, and outlined the complex ways in which he used space to negotiate ideas of temporality, community, and the self” (Whitehead, 2008: 2251-2254). Whitehead traces this tradition in her work. Cf. chapter 1 of Whitehead’s *Memory* for “practices of remembrance that are defined and shaped by the surrounding culture” and how it “resonates with classical and early-modern conceptions of memory” (Whitehead, 2008: 2236-2238).

Durkheim's social psychology, his encounter with it "left enduring traces on his work and thought" (Whitehead, 2008: 2260).

However, within two decades after its initial publication, Halbwachs' writings and thought had fallen into oblivion (Apfelbaum, 2010: 77), only to really be discovered again with the publication of *The Collective Memory* in 1980. This is often said to mark the start of a *memory boom* characterised by the publication of seminal works in the field of memory studies such as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora's anthology, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984–92), already referred to. Other key works followed in the early 1990s, including James Young's *The Texture of Memory* (1993) and Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) (Whitehead, 2008: 2226–2229). In today's ever-expanding field of memory studies, "virtually no theoretical model of cultural memory exists without recourse to [Halbwachs]" (Erl, 2011: 14).

It is argued that the time and place in which Halbwachs lived caused him to gain "experience of geographical and cultural uprooting" from the early stages of his life (Apfelbaum, 2010: 78). He was born in 1877 to an Alsatian family who came to live in Reims due to the Franco-Prussian war that ended in 1871. When Alsace-Lorraine was annexed by Germany, its inhabitants were forced to choose between French and German citizenship. The Halbwachs family chose to remain French, although they remained deeply connected to Germanic culture (Apfelbaum, 2010: 78). As Apfelbaum states, this "sensitised him to the way in which one's personal life and sense of social integrity are influenced by changing geopolitical configurations, and affected his approach to the issue of memory. This was particularly so in regard to his insistence that the development of subjective memory carries the impression of external social relations" (Apfelbaum, 2010: 78). Halbwachs also experienced both the First and the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, published in 1925, was "conceived, elaborated and written in the wake of the First World War" (Apfelbaum, 2010: 82). These very specificities of his own lifetime, being born "into an unstable world undergoing deep social and political change" (Apfelbaum, 2010: 78), both influenced his work and inhibited the (initial) legacy thereof.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The latter cost him his life. He died of exhaustion in Buchenwald in 1945 (Apfelbaum, 2010: 81).

<sup>13</sup> Apfelbaum explains the lack of reception of Halbwachs' works as follows: "The social sciences, directly reflecting the changing concerns of postwar society, took an altogether different theoretical turn: the race for progress that characterised the second half of the twentieth century implied a radical break from the traditions of the past. The words of the revolutionary song 'The International,' which involved making the past a *tabula rasa*, became the rallying cry for a majority in the post-war generation, and the epistemological choices of the social sciences reflected this trend, conceptualising a society unencumbered by the complexities of history, as if subjects evolved in a vacuum with no significant historical and

Halbwachs' time was also the time in which memory entered the field of sociology. He himself of course contributed greatly to this shift by, especially, the publication of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, through which the conceptualisation of memory shifted "out of a biological framework and into a cultural one" (Misztal, 2003: 45).

#### 1.5.2.2. Memory as a social fact

For Halbwachs, memory is never a solitary activity, but always a social one: we never remember alone (Ricoeur 2004: 121). Without a group, or the idea of the social, we cannot articulate our memories in any coherent or meaningful way. Our memories quickly fade if they do not find a place or some sort of reciprocity outside of the remembering individual. His "model emphasises the partial and incomplete nature of past recollections, and he attributes the ability to remember not to internal processes but to the reawakening of former experiences by external stimuli, such as meeting an old friend" (Whitehead, 2008: 2274-2278).

This is an idea Halbwachs develops in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925). His concept of *cadres sociaux* (social frameworks) is the starting point of his theory of collective memory (Erll, 2011: 15). In *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Halbwachs reflects on dreams and language, and by giving a detailed illustration of the collective elements of individual memory concludes that "the recourse to *cadres sociaux*, social frameworks, is an indispensable prerequisite for every act of remembering" (Erll, 2011: 15). As Halbwachs observed the difficulties that war veterans had on their return from the front "to restore 'normal' social bonds, their problems in re-establishing communication in their home environments, their reluctance to recount their traumatic wartime experiences" (Apfelbaum, 2010: 82), he began to ask questions about "the complex relations between uprooting, interpersonal exchanges, and the processes of memorisation" (82).<sup>14</sup>

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genealogical inscription in the world. This new vision was less accommodating to the cultivation of the past implied by Halbwachs' concerns with memory and socio-historical perspective, and with no intellectual followers to investigate his theories and carry on his analyses, his ideas were quickly forgotten" (2010: 82).

<sup>14</sup> In the preface to *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Halbwachs tells the story of a young girl (nine or ten years old) who was found in the woods near Châlons in 1731 to explain "in what sense one may say that memory depends on the social environment" (Halbwachs, 1992: 37). Although a child of that age is supposed to possess many recollections, she loses the ability to remember things that she used to recall without difficulty when she is taken from her milieu. "The child has left one society in order to pass into another. It seems that at the same time the child will have lost the ability to remember in the second society all that he did and all that impressed him, which he used to recall without difficulty, in the first. In order to retrieve some of these uncertain and incomplete memories it is necessary that the child, in the new society

Halbwachs is critical of the tendency of psychology to focus on the individual when trying to make sense of a person, and holds that memory are recalled externally:

[Psychological treatises that deal with memory as an individual faculty] make it appear that to understand our mental operations, we need to stick to individuals and first of all, to divide all the bonds which attach individuals to the society and their fellows. Yet it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognise, and localise their memories ... Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs. There is nothing mysterious about recall of memories in these cases at least. There is no point in seeking where they are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking (Halbwachs, 1992: 38).

However, Halbwachs does seem to be conscious of the fact that this may lead to talking in circles: if we say that we remember through others, then how would we explain their memory in turn (Halbwachs, 1992: 39)? To escape from this spiral, he changes the question: instead of asking *how* the past recurs (“in my consciousness or in the consciousness of others”), he asks *why* it recurs and further, “Would it recur if it was not preserved?” (39). Then, in line with the classic theory of memory, he momentarily gives preference to questions about the preservation of memories before trying to give an account of their recall: the past recurs because it is preserved and our theories of recollection/remembering are dependent on the way in which the past is preserved.

However, Halbwachs is not willing to agree to an explanation of the preservation of memories either as cerebral processes or as “psychic states that subsist in the mind in an unconscious state and that they can become conscious again when recollected” (39). According to Whitehead (2008: 2260-2272), it is at this point that Halbwachs’ break from Bergson can be observed clearly. For Bergson, all past experiences, all the events of our daily life, are retained in memory. They are stored in the unconscious: complete and perfect and readily available for future recollection. But for Halbwachs, this model of “ready-made images” stored in “some subterranean gallery of our thought” (Halbwachs 1992: 75) “seems overly cumbersome, for it implies that we are perpetually burdened by

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of which he is part, at least be shown images reconstructing for a moment the group and the milieu from which the child had been torn” (Halbwachs, 1992: 37-38).

the past” (Whitehead, 2008: 2260-2272): “Each individual mind would in this manner drag behind itself the whole array of its memories” (Halbwachs quoted in Whitehead, 2275).

In contrast to this, Halbwachs’ own model “emphasises the partial and incomplete nature of past recollection, and he attributes the ability to remember not to internal processes but to the reawakening of former experiences by external stimuli” (Whitehead, 2008: 2260-2272). For him, the group to which we belong provides individuals with *frameworks* into which their remembrances are woven: “[W]e can find in society all the necessary information for reconstructing certain parts of our past represented in an incomplete and indefinite manner ...” (Halbwachs, 1980: 75). This leads him to argue that “in reality the past does not recur as such” (Halbwachs, 1992: 39) and that it is also not preserved. Rather, it is “reconstructed on the basis of the present” (Halbwachs, 1992: 40) through the use of collective frameworks of memory. Halbwachs explains it as follows:

It is necessary to show, besides, that the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society (40).

And furthermore:

It is not sufficient, in effect, to show that individuals always use social frameworks when they remember. It is necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the group or groups. The two problems, moreover, are not only related: they are in effect one. One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realises and manifests itself in individual memories” (40).

Halbwachs thus acknowledges the agency of the group and the individual in the process of remembering. We participate as individuals in the events, but our memories remain collective “because we always think as members of the group to which we belong, because our ideas originated within it and because our thinking keeps us in contact with that group” (Misztal, 2003: 53). This is, for Halbwachs, the starting point of collective memory: not that the collective is an aggregate or sum of the individual, but that there is a reciprocity between the individual and the group to such an extent that it is impossible to give preference to one or the other. The individual is always part of a group, and the group is always made up of individuals. These groups, Misztal emphasises, are “affective



communities within which our feelings and thoughts originate” and within which it is also “reorganised and reconstructed” (Miszta, 2003: 53).

Halbwachs argues against the idea, as Gardner puts it, that “my memories are surely mine and no one else’s” (Gardner, 2010: 102) and that it is something held “within the invisible enclosure of representation, locking it within our head, in the mind” (Ricoeur quoted in Gardner, 2010: 102). Rather, Gardner argues, “the form and function of memory are essentially social ...” (Gardner, 2010: 102). For Halbwachs, “there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection” (Halbwachs, 1992: 38). Social frameworks are “thought patterns, cognitive schemata that guide our perception and memory in particular directions. Social frameworks, thus, form an all-encompassing horizon in which our perception and memory is embedded. They are constituted from social, material, and mental phenomena of culture” (Erll, 2011: 15-16).

This introduces a shift in focus: memory is not something that we *have* but rather something that we *do*: memory as recollection. This focus shows us “that memory is not simply an ever-expanding mental receptacle for all that we have experienced, all that we have done, and all that we have learned, but also the medium through which we actively reflect upon and order these things” (Gardner, 2010: 100-101). Memory, therefore, is malleable, and we need to note what the influences on memory are and how it varies “from place to place or from one group to another and how [memories] change over time ... and we need to understand how they are shaped and by whom” (Burke in Olick et al., 2011: 189). When trying to come to terms with the interplay between the group and the individual, it is furthermore important to keep in mind that individuals belong to different groups at once.

Perhaps as an attempt to answer Halbwachs question, “Where is memory preserved?”, we can change it to ask, “Where is memory to be found?” and then answer that it is found in the meaning-making processes that establish movement between individuals and groups, pasts and presents. Both these sets of interactions are ultimately important because “without social interaction[,] worlds of meaning can neither come into being nor be passed on” (Erll, 2011: 16).

Two important things about memory ought to be emphasised at this point: firstly, memory as recollection is not the retrieval of “images of the past as they were originally perceived but rather as they fit into our present conceptions, which are shaped by the social forces that act upon us” (Hutton quoted in Gardner, 2010: 103); and secondly, studying memories in this way are not important “for what they tell us about the



specificity of an individual life” but rather “for their illumination of the collective structures of meaning” through which the past is remembered and commemorated in a particular way (Gardner, 2010: 103). From this perspective, we are interested in memory for it always constitutes “a relationship between pasts and a particular present” (Clare and Johnson quoted in Gardner, 2010: 103) because it is “constructed within contemporary social frameworks” (Gardner, 2010: 103).

### 1.5.2.3 Memory and identity

Halbwachs’ assertion that social frameworks have a shaping influence on memory hints at the connection between memory and identity. Memory is at once reorganised and reconstructed (Miształ, 2003: 53), but on what basis? What constitutes the common thinking and understanding that informs a group’s memory?

A group’s memory is limited by but also defined in space and time, and this implies that the memory of a group is unique and contributes to the construction of its identity. The connection between social framework and collective memory is also a connection between social group and collective memory (Miształ, 2003: 51). The identification of this connection is Halbwachs’ fundamental contribution to the field, and his “assertion that every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity is still the starting point for all research in the field” (Miształ, 2003: 51).

This brings us to yet another aspect of Halbwachs’ thinking: his distinction between memory and history on the basis of how they relate to time and space, and hence deal with change.<sup>15</sup> In the collective memory of a group, there is always the tension between

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<sup>15</sup> Halbwachs argues that history can only exist through abstraction from time and space: “History can be represented as the universal memory of the human species. But there is no universal memory. Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. The totality of past events can be put together in a single record only by separating them from the memory of the groups who preserved them and by severing the bonds that held them close to the psychological life of the social milieus where they occurred, while retaining only the group’s chronological and spatial outline of them. This procedure no longer entails restoring them to lifelike reality, but requires relocating them within the frameworks with which history organises events. These frameworks are external to these groups and define them by mutual contrast. That is, history is interested primarily in differences and disregards the resemblances without which there would have been no memory, since the only facts remembered are those having the common trait of belonging to the same consciousness. Despite the variety of times and places, history reduces events to seemingly comparable terms, allowing their interrelation as variations on one or several themes. Only in this way does it manage to give us a summary vision of the past, gathering into a moment and symbolising in a few abrupt changes or in certain stages undergone by a people or individual, a slow collective evolution. In this way it presents us a unique and total image of the past” (Halbwachs, 1980: 84).

unity and diversity, durability and change, and the strength of the group is determined by how it can manage these opposites for the sake of continuity in time. Even the degree to which the group's identity is dynamic and able to accommodate differences is put to the test because the members of a group are not stable, and neither is their "relationship to [the] various collective milieus" (Miszta, 2003: 51) to which individuals necessarily belong (Halbwachs, 1980: 48).

Time and space and the way it is connected to each other play a very important role in our ability to experience continuity and sameness, and, as Halbwachs would have it, to remember at all. It is important for the "anchoring of group recollections" and for "ensuring their preservation" (Miszta, 2003: 52). Memory is formed in relation to something experienced as stable, and in turn it adds to this stability. This sense of stability is important for a group to "rediscover the past in the present and feel their own continuity" (Miszta, 2003: 51). In this way, the group achieves a sense of *being the same*: "[A]n illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present" (Halbwachs, 1980: 157) is necessary for stability. This stability is provided by the (social) framework of space: "[T]hat's how memory is defined. Space alone is stable enough to endure without growing old or losing any of its parts" (Halbwachs, 1980: 157).

For Halbwachs, identity is at the centre of memory: the concern of remaining the same through time. This is also how Halbwachs explains the difference between history and memory:

History is a record of changes; it is naturally persuaded that societies change constantly, because it focuses on the whole, and hardly a year passes when some part of the whole is not transformed ... Apparently the sequence of historical events is discontinuous ... In reality, those who write history and pay primary attention to changes and differences understand that passing from one such difference to another requires the unfolding of a sequence of transformations of which history perceives only the sum (in the sense of the integral calculus) or final result. This viewpoint of history is due to its examining groups from the outside and to its encompassing a rather long duration (Halbwachs, 1980: 86).

But Halbwachs perceives memory to be different from this:

In contrast, the collective memory is the group seen from within during a period not exceeding, and most often much shorter than, the average duration of human life. It provides the group a self-portrait that unfolds through time, since it is an image of the past, and allows the group to recognise itself throughout the total succession of images. The collective memory is a record of resemblances and, naturally, is convinced that the

group remains the same because it focuses attention on the group, whereas what has changed are the group's relations or contracts with other groups. If the group always remains the same, any changes must be imaginary, and the changes that do occur in the group are transformed into similarities. Their function is to develop the several aspects of one single content - that is, the various fundamental characteristics of the group itself ... The group is undoubtedly under the influence of an illusion when it believes the similarities more important than the differences, but it clearly cannot account for the differences, because the images it has previously made of itself are only slowly transformed. But the framework may be enlarged or compressed without being destroyed, and the assumption may be made that the groups has only gradually focused on previously unemphasised aspects of itself. What is essential is that the features distinguishing it from other groups survive and be imprinted on all its content (Halbwachs, 1980: 86-87).

Through collective memory, two things are therefore to be discerned: a shared image of the past and the social identity of the group (Misztal, 2003: 52). By keeping these two things intact, collective memory "ensures solidarity and continuity" (52).

#### 1.5.2.4. Commemoration

Although time and space are *natural* delimitations of memory, they are at the same time boundaries that can be enforced or to put it differently: a group can colonise both time and space through memory by "ordering important dates within a commemorative sequence" (Misztal 2003: 52). The past is hereby conformed to the conceptions of the group, conveying an illusion of timelessness and continuity (52). As will become clear throughout our study, recollections that are anchored in both space and time obtain fixedness in a group's imagination. The group's image of its external milieu and assumed stable relationships with its environment becomes a paramount aspect of the idea it forms of itself (Halbwachs quoted in Misztal, 2003: 52). Halbwachs argued that a group remains united even after it has been dispersed because it "think[s] of the old home and its layout" (52). In other words, the spatial image alone, by reason of its stability, gives us "an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present" (Halbwachs quoted in Misztal, 2003: 52).

The idea of *recreating* time and space through memory asks for closer examination of an important concept: commemoration. The official definition of commemoration I would like to use comes from Kirk Savage as quoted by Alan Kirk in his introduction to *Memory, Tradition and Text* (2005): "*Commemoration is the effort to fix the meaning and purpose of crucial memories in an enduring form*" (Kirk, 2005: 7). This implies that commemoration makes memories durable – it gives memory a material basis (7).

Let us consider the different aspects of this definition of commemoration systematically. First, commemoration shows a concern for the fixedness and durability of memory. This concern can indeed often be seen in physical memorials. More often than not, memorials are objects that are carefully crafted from granite, marble or some kind of metal. It is something hard and resistant. Furthermore, it does not simply appear – a memorial or statue is mostly commissioned. Someone – a person or institution – names an event or figure as memorable and commissions a memorial. As mentioned above, commemorative sites are not only physical places or statues/monuments, but can also include texts, concepts, expressions and symbols. In these cases, durability takes on different forms. Founding texts, for example, can be made durable through print, mass distribution and institutionalised memorisation.

This brings us to the second important aspect of commemorations according to Savage's definition: it is focused on "crucial memories". However, memories are not crucial in and of themselves but are given a specific status by someone. Commemorations are therefore by definition selective. From a vast, complex and mostly incoherent past, single memories are chosen to represent and narrate the past of a specific group. Even before any meaning has been attached to the memories identified as *crucial*, what is chosen says a lot about who the community choosing them understands themselves to be.

This does not imply a unanimous community, however. Despite the concern for permanence and fixedness that are at the heart of commemorations and its meanings, it is agreed that it is in fact ephemeral and dynamic in the long term (Kirk, 2005: 7; Winter, 2010: 322). Commemoration involves a struggle for control of ideas, beliefs, sentiments and hopes and as such it remains open for renegotiation. There is always the potential for new groups to create new sites of memory or reappropriate old ones – even if it is done in the name of continuity. This also implies that, even if a particular meaning appears dominant, sites of memory have a multivocal character. Commemorations encapsulate a chorus of voices, even if some are louder than others (Kirk, 7).

The third aspect of the definition deals with the *form* of memories. Despite being transient and changing, commemorated memories take on a specific form and have significant impact on a community's identity and self-articulation. Given the transience, how does the fixing of the meaning and purpose of memories occur? How is the past cast in a fixed form that makes it able to endure in time?

Although actual memorials become important physical places that recall certain memories, these places are often inaugurated with the creation of rituals. What the memory that is recalled means is defined and explicated through the inauguration and rituals. In this way, recollection is turned into a habit. This habituary or ritualised aspect of commemoration is so important that Savage argues that commemorative rituals should be viewed as something in itself – not necessarily connected to a physical site, and hence as something that does not necessarily leave a lasting trace on a landscape (Savage,

2007: 9). Paul Connerton, too, pays special attention to this second aspect of fixing memory. For him, commemorative ceremonies together with bodily practices are the cornerstones of conveying and sustaining images and recollected knowledge of the past, because of the way in which it facilitates the ritual performance of the past (Connerton, 1989: 897).<sup>16 17</sup>

Memories of historical events are translated into ritual and by definition represented in a specific and fixed way, with the result that a distilled version of a past event is connected with a certain symbol that is often sacralised. It is important to note, as Kirk points out, drawing on the work of Yerushalmi, that historical detail “recedes to the minimum required to support the symbolic appropriation” (Kirk, 2005: 8). History is then submitted to the contours of the ritual. Kirk states: “A complex history is thereby precipitated out into a stable ritual artefact, bearer of dense symbolic meaning, with enormous capacity to perdure in multiple enactments through time” (8).

This brings us to another important aspect of Savage’s definition: through commemoration, *meaning and purpose* are assigned to the past. The meaning of the past for any contemporary community is not a given, but essentially a hermeneutic activity. As already stated, the possible meanings of the past are already delimited by the memories defined as “crucial” as well as by the rituals and symbols connected to these memories. This means that “commemoration is a way of forming its object in the process of representing it” (Schwartz quoted by Kirk, 8). We can argue that commemoration itself shapes the memory it recalls.

There is also another implication to consider. Through the rituals and symbols that make up a commemorative event, the past is presented and experienced with “powerful immediacy” (Rozenzweig & Thelen quoted by Kirk, 8). As such, a commemorative event remakes time. A single commemorative event does not illustrate this potential very well. However, if one considers a community’s commemorative calendar (as we will in Chapter 5), it becomes clear that a new imaginative framework is created, and that this, in turn, shapes people’s understanding and expectations of the world they live in.<sup>18</sup> This demonstrates the ability of commemoration to link past, present and future in a powerful

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<sup>16</sup> The Kindle edition of Connerton’s book was used. The numbers in brackets therefore refers to locations in the electronic text, and not to page numbers.

<sup>17</sup> Connerton also argues that the relatively informal sets of actions that he calls “culturally specific bodily practices” have much in common with the relatively more formal sets of actions he calls “commemorative ceremonies” (1989: 2197). To understand the formation of collective memory and identity of a community, then, we have to pay attention to both these groups of practices.

<sup>18</sup> Connerton (1989) discusses the power of creating *a new time* in the formation of ideologies with reference to the commemorative calendar instituted by the Nazi regime between January 1933 and September 1939. He highlights the “constant reminder” of the National Socialist Party and its ideology that this brought about and also points out how successfully it was related to the feasts on the Christian calendar. See Connerton 1989: 899.

way, and hints at the impact that commemorations have on the identity of a community. Connerton explains this link between times as follows:

Calendars make it possible to juxtapose with the structure of profane time a further structure, one qualitatively distinct from the former and irreducible to it, in which the most notable events of sacred time are assembled together and co-ordinated. Each day is thus locatable in two quite different orders of time: there is the day on which such and such events take place in the world, and there is the day on which one celebrates the memory of this or that moment of a sacred or mythic history (Connerton, 1989: 1413).

This hermeneutical and temporal aspect of commemorations have far-reaching implications. It shapes communities' frameworks of making sense of the world. New events are assimilated to past events (Kirk, 2005: 16) – particularly the conceptual frameworks established through commemorative representations of the past. Familiar archetypes of what the world is and what one's position in it is become extremely hard to change or consider afresh. As Kirk writes, memory or “master narratives” are reactualised “in commemorative rituals and artifacts that [habituate] the salient past and [give] it power to affect a community's perceptions of its experiences” (Kirk, 17).

As with collective memory, the important thing with commemoration is that, unlike history which strives to be objective, universal and academic, it is ephemeral – it is practised and hence dependent on a group delimited in space and time, as Halbwachs famously argued in his posthumous essay “Historical memory and collective memory” (1950). Our view of the past is never brought about by one single factor, but is a hard to discern mixture of academic history, family traditions, religious practices and mass media.

### *1.5.3. Confession and tradition*

Section 1.3 highlighted that there are different ways in which confessions can be discussed: theologically, ecclesiologically, and historically (distinguishing between origin, reception and remembering). The theological and ecclesiological nature of confessions vary from tradition to tradition. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the meaning and position of confessions within the Reformed tradition. This section briefly discusses the nature of Reformed confessions at the hand of an article by D.J. Smit, “Bevrydende waarheid – nagedink oor die aard van Gereformeerde belydenis” (2006). The discussion will be complemented with a brief discussion of Alistair MacIntyre's definition of tradition and Jurgen Rüsen's understanding of tradition as a mode of historical sense-making.

For Smit, the reformed tradition is essentially a confessional tradition (Smit, 2006: 135). This implies that confessions play a key role in the manner this tradition understands and

explains itself. It also serves as the way through which any reformed community in a specific context links itself with the age-old confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (Smit, 2006: 135). Confessions function as a medium through which a community's continuity with and loyalty to the tradition are established and expressed.

Smit states that there is no specific set of criteria in the reformed tradition according to which a document can easily be qualified as a confession (136). Confession is not a technical term, he argues (136). Moreover, confessions fulfil various diverging functions of which he identifies six: 1) they serve a doxological function and provide the church and believers with language with which to glorify God; 2) they serve as hermeneutical lenses with which to read and understand Scripture; 3) they constitute or show the way toward unity amid uncertainty, confusion, division and conflict; 4) they serve as educational tools to form believers' faith, life, orientation and discernment; 5) they serve as a way to discern truth from falsehood in times of disagreement and confusion in the church and among believers and are often meant to unmask heresy; and 6) they serve as public witness about Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel (Smit, 137).

As Smit points out, the same confession can fulfil various functions, and a confession that originated with one function in mind can fulfil different functions later (138).

When it comes to the question about what the nature of Reformed confessions is, Smit states that there are various different approaches to answering this question (139). When one asks about the binding power, authority or nature of loyalty to confessions, one is met with contrasting views from within the tradition. Views about this can and have even led to schisms. Therefore, Smit argues that this very multiplicity of views about the essence of Reformed confessions is characteristic of the Reformed tradition itself (and this is very different from other Protestant groups, like Lutherans, for example) (140). The reformed confessional tradition and corpus, Smit argues, are complex, rich, and varied, and this complexity is an integral part of the Reformed engagement with its confessions (141).

Moreover, Smit explains that the authority of Reformed confessions is always relative authority because a) it is subordinated to the final authority of the Bible, and its



agreement with the Bible is never final but always open for criticism and change<sup>19</sup> (143-144) and b) all Reformed confessions are thoroughly historical and contextual (145).<sup>20</sup>

Smit emphasises that, for these reasons, the formation of new confessional documents sometimes become necessary. However, when new confessions are formed (during a status confessionis), Smit states, the community who confesses is deeply dependent on the ecumenical church (145). When confessing, it is part of a larger tradition.

Although Smit's description is specifically of the Reformed tradition and the role of the confessions in it, it reminds one of some definitions of tradition in general. Diarmaid MacCulloch, for example, states that "the nature of tradition is not that of a humanly manufactured mechanical or architectural structure with a constant outline and form, but rather that of a plant, pulsing with life and continually changing shape while keeping the same ultimate identity" (MacCulloch, 2009: 7-8).<sup>21</sup>

A similarly dynamic definition of tradition often quoted is that of Alistair MacIntyre: "A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely about the goods which constitute that tradition" (MacIntyre, 1984: 222). Robert Vosloo's (2010a: 18-31) discussion of MacIntyre's definition is very helpful and I will draw on it here to highlight the main points of this definition of tradition.

The first important aspect of MacIntyre's definition for this study is the place it gives to conflict in a tradition. A tradition that is in "good order" (Vosloo, 24) is not one that is free

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<sup>19</sup> Smit continues: "Die Belydenis het gesag ómdat dit die Woord van God se eie gesag agter hom het, ja, maar dis alles tot tyd en wyl, tans, op die oomblik, met huidige leiding en lig, met huidige geestelike insig en onderskeidingsvermoë. Dis in beginsel altyd moontlik dat die Gees en die Woord die geloofsgemeenskap tot ánder insig en oortuiging mag bring ... [Die belydenis] word nie 'n opsomming van die Bybel of 'n samevatting van die boodskap van die Bybel op só 'n manier dat intense en gemeenskaplike, gelowige omgang met die Bybel self eintlik onnodig word nie. Intendeel, die belydenisskrifte, as konfessionele hermeneutiek, nooi juis die gemeente uit om steeds weer vars en nuut, met verwagting en vertroue, na die Bybel self te bly luister" (Smit, 2006: 144).

<sup>20</sup> Smit continues: "Waar die Belydenisskrifte in sekere periodes van sommige gereformeerde tradisies – sêlf onder baie begryplike kulturele en sosiaal-historiese invloede! – wel as sulke tyd- en kontekslose sisteme van waarheid geles is, het dit telkens gelei tot problematiese opvattinge van waarheid (as geleë in die akkuraatheid van proposisies), van geloof (as intellektuele gehoorsaamheid aan gesaghebbende dokumente, vergaderings, besluite of selfs figure), van geloofskennis (as intellektuele vertrouwdheid met historiese feite en korrekte formulerings) van sekerheid (as rasonale konklusies uit onbetwisbare aksiomas) van gesag (as primêr institusioneel en juridies) en van die eie-aard van funksionering van gereformeerde belydenisskrifte self (as finale denksisteme, wat gebruik kan word as 'stok om mee te slaan' teenoor diegene wat afwyk van die presiese uitdrukkings en formulerings van die gesaghebbende belydeniskorpus)" (145).

<sup>21</sup> The Catholic philosopher, Josef Pieper, too, offers such a definition of tradition in his book *Tradition: Concept and Claim* (2010): "It is especially clear here how little real tradition is something purely static and how false it is to confuse the concept of tradition with inertia, never mind with stagnation. In truth, the activity of the living transmission of a traditum is a highly dynamic business" (Pieper quoted in Vosloo, 2010a: 22).



of conflict. Rather, a healthy tradition is always partially constructed by an ongoing argument about the goods that constitute the tradition and give it its specific point and purpose (24). For MacIntyre, stability and conflict are not opposed or as Vosloo puts it, “[v]ital traditions ... embody continuities and conflicts” (25).<sup>22</sup> Conflict can be caused by external rivals as well as by ones that are part of the tradition. Rival claims about or against a tradition are part of the reality of traditions.

Second, the *goods* that are up for discussion, and which the tradition pursues, extend across generations. It is an *argument* with a long history about *goods* with a long history that indicates both continuities and discontinuities in time (26). The challenge to those participating in the tradition is “to give some account of how the restatements and re-embodiments of the tradition show continuity with past statements and embodiments of the tradition in question” (Vosloo, 2010a: 22).

This leads us to the third important aspect of which the argument is socially embodied. Reflection on tradition goes hand in hand with reflection on communities and their narratives, practices and institutions (25).

Although MacIntyre sees conflict as an important aspect of traditions and not something that weakens it per se, he acknowledges that traditions can be strong or weak. This leads him to ask: “What then sustains and strengthens traditions? What weakens and destroys them?” (MacIntyre quoted in Vosloo, 26).

For MacIntyre, the answers to these questions lie in the exercise or lack thereof of certain virtues: justice, truthfulness and courage (Vosloo, 26). He also adds a *special* virtue to this list: “the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one” (MacIntyre quoted in Vosloo, 26).

Despite the resources available within a tradition, and the methods with which participants can unearth these resources, MacIntyre acknowledges the moment of “epistemological crisis” that may confront a tradition. This occurs when a tradition’s methods of enquiry have become sterile, “with conflicts over rival answers to key questions unable to be settled rationally” (Vosloo, 26). Vosloo explains this moment and its challenges as follows:

[In an epistemological crisis] there seem[s] to be insufficient resources within the established fabric of belief to respond to the crisis, resulting in the dissolution of historically-founded certitudes ... How traditions respond to an epistemological crisis determines whether they will attain intellectual

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<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere Vosloo also argues that the vitality of a tradition coheres with the way in which each generation continues to discuss the relevance of authoritative texts and persons. See Vosloo (2004: 942) “Anderkant etiek? Tradisie, dekonstruksie en verdere weë”.

maturity. Inventiveness is required, and new concepts invented to address it must satisfy three requirements. First, the new and conceptually enriched scheme must furnish a solution to problems previously deemed intractable. Second, an explanation must be provided of what rendered the tradition sterile and/or incoherent. Third, these tasks must be carried out in a way that exhibits fundamental continuity with the shared beliefs of the past ... Traditions are thus, according to MacIntyre, vindicated or not vindicated through their response to epistemological crises” (26-28).

A central tenet of both Smit’s description of Reformed confessions and Vosloo’s explication of MacIntyre’s understanding of tradition is temporality. The meaning of neither confessions nor tradition is fixed. Interpreting it is an engagement from the present through the past. In other words, one can say, tradition is a form of historical sense-making.

In his article, “Tradition: a principle of historical sense-generation and its logic and effect in historical culture” (2012), Jorn Rüsen provides a helpful explanation of tradition as a form of historical sense-making over and against other forms of historical sense-making. Rüsen aims to “thematise [tradition’s] basic logic of generating sense and meaning in understanding the human world” (47). As such, his article provides a scheme to understand different modes of historical sense-making and then to understand how tradition is a particular mode in that process. Rüsen defines tradition as a

... cultural orientation for practical human life using a certain reference to the past. In this reference the present is provided with a paradigm for ordering the human world by the past. Here value-systems, rules of human conduct, and basic understandings of the world are pre-given. Tradition does not result from decisions, but it provides a framework within which decisions are made. It is a very powerful element of human culture indeed (46).

Because tradition has an important time element as part of its structure, it plays an important role in historical consciousness. For Rüsen, historical consciousness is the activity of transforming the past into history (47), and this activity has four main elements: “a) an *experience* of the past, b) a framework for *interpreting* it, c) the interpreted past’s function in the cultural *orientation* of present-day human life, and d) the interpreted past’s impact on the *motivation* that conditions the activities of practical life in a temporal direction toward the future” (47).

The main goal of this activity, according to Rüsen, is continuity and stability, and it is here that tradition “as the oldest and most fundamental form of history” (50) plays an important part. But because tradition is not the only form of history, Rüsen holds that it

is important to place tradition “in its historical diversity in the highly complex network of historical sense-generation in general” (50). In short then, Rüsen holds that in order to understand historical sense-generation at all, it is paramount that we understand “the peculiarity of tradition and its basic logic” (50). Tradition is peculiar because of how it differs from the other three modes of historical sense-generation by narration distinguished by Rüsen (51).

Rüsen presents these modes in the following table (52):

<b><i>Types of Historical Narration</i></b>	<b><i>Reference to the past</i></b>	<b><i>Course of time</i></b>	<b><i>Mode of communication</i></b>	<b><i>Forming of identity by</i></b>	<b><i>Sense of time</i></b>
Traditional	origins and continuity of life-order	duration in change	based on agreement about non-disputable concepts	taking over pre-given (“natural”) patterns of belonging	time gets sense by eternity in change
Exemplary	events as cases demonstrating general rules	pragmatic sequence of events	argumentation by discernment and judgment	rule-competence (prudence)	time gets sense by supertemporal morality
Genetic	change of forms of life	development	temporal contextualisation	individualisation	time gets sense by temporalisation
Critical	events negating the validity of pre-given orders	rupture, discontinuity	partiality against established orientations	resisting demands of commitment	time gets sense by judgment

With reference to this table, Rüsen explains historical narratives that present the past as *tradition* as doing the following:

They refer to the past by asking for origins and continuity of world-orders and forms of life; they conceptualise time as duration in change; they organise communication in the form of pre-given agreement or acceptance (implicitness); they bring about identity by confirming pre-given modes of belonging – here identity is a matter of mimesis (imitation); and finally, they give time the meaning of eternity (not beyond but within change in human affairs) (51).

With this explanation of the traditional mode, it is rather straightforward to read the table

and grasp how the other modes differ from it. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these are all strategies of historical sense-generation and they are therefore equally historical (51). Rüsen forthrightly claims universal validity for his typology and holds that all types can be found at all times, “but always in complex interrelationships and constellations, which represent the peculiarity of historical thinking according to different times and spaces” (52).

The three concepts discussed here – confessions, tradition and historical consciousness – are deep and complex. Engaging with them fully would not be possible within this study. However, they are important as guiding principles within the study and will help us in particular to identify the limits of arguments and interpretative frameworks.

## 1.6. The Heidelberg Catechism in the life of the DRC

### 1.6.1. *The Heidelberg Catechism as an institutional document*

It will be clear throughout the study that the institutional position of the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC added a lot of weight to it as a site of memory. The Heidelberg Catechism is not just a significant and beloved catechism, but forms part of the official confessional foundation of the DRC and is enforced by a subscription formula. Furthermore, the church order stipulated very specific rules about the regular preaching of the Catechism in congregations. Compliance with this rule was monitored by presbyteries (even if no definite measures for non-compliance were in place).

Firstly, then, the Catechism formed part of the confessional basis of the DRC since its formal inception in 1824 when the first DRC Synod constituted as an autonomous body from the Amsterdam classis. In its very first Church Order, the Catechism is named, together with the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt, as the confessional foundation of the DRC. This was no novelty, of course, since being part of the Amsterdam classis since 1652 meant being grounded in these confessions.

Even though the 1824 “wette en bepalingen”<sup>23</sup> of the DRC became widely viewed as not being in accordance with the Church Order of Dordt, this fact was regarded as an unfortunate oversight (Van der Watt, 1980: 39). Van der Watt supports the DRC’s commitment to the Church Order of Dordt by highlighting that the chairperson, J.C. Berrangé, requested the governor of the Cape Colony to print the Church Order stating

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<sup>23</sup> “laws and conditions”

that it “is a fundamental Document of all the Regulations of our Church to which we are all bound to conform” (Van der Watt, 39). By this time, it was also customary for the Formulae to be printed at the back of Bibles and hymn books, making the texts widely available (Oberholzer, 1986: 7). The Synod of 1824 even decided to publish the Catechism in English for the sake of the religious education of the broader population (Oberholzer, 7).

Secondly, the Catechism’s position in the church order was enforced through a subscription formula, giving it legal power in the life of the church. In the early days (at that stage, still as part of the Classis of Amsterdam), not only ministers but also teachers and *sieketroosters* (comforters of the sick) had to sign the Catechism together with the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt (Britz, 1993: 520). Van der Watt also states that the two members of the church council of the first Cape congregation had to subscribe to the Formulae (Van der Watt 1976: 8).

Thirdly, the church order prescribed regular preaching on the Catechism and, in a less consistent manner, the use of the Catechism in catechetical teaching. During the period of Dutch government of the Cape (1652-1795), the Cape church was part of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands and shared its practices (Oberholzer, 1986: 7). The practice of fortnightly public reading from or preaching on the Catechism dates to the earliest days of the Reformed community at the Cape. Even before the first minister arrived in 1665 and, hence, before the Cape had an official congregation, the *sieketroosters* (of which Willem Barentsz Wylant was the first) observed this practice (Van der Watt, 1976: 5). This included reading from Ursinus’s *Het Schatboek der verklaringen van de Heidelbergse Catechismus* or Lansbergius’s *Den Catechismus*, followed by children reciting the questions, answers and supporting texts (Oberholzer, 7). Moreover, the *Gereformeerde Maandblad* of June 1894 states that slaves in the Cape older than twelve years had to recite the Heidelberg Catechism on Sunday afternoons in the late 17th century (GM, 1894: 25).

Biweekly preaching on the Catechism was also prescribed by the church order of the newly constituted church, and in 1829 “regular preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism” became a fixed point on the agenda during church visitations (Oberholzer, 7). This remained to be the practice in the DRC until 1842 and thenceforth the church order stated that ministers had to preach on the Catechism at least twelve times a year. Congregations were required to report to the local presbytery whether this was adhered to or not (Du Toit, 1963: preface). According to Gerstner, these services were not overly popular (Gerstner, 1991: 32) and in 1773 and 1829 carelessness about them was reported (Oberholzer, 1986: 7). There is good reason to think that, despite the importance given to

the Catechism by the church order, these services were never particularly enjoyed by congregants. In January 1933, too, it is reported that Catechism sermons are unpopular and that ministers' failure to preach on the Catechism monthly is bemoaned at every circuit meeting ("Ringsvergadering") (Editorial, 1933: 52-53). The lack of enthusiasm for Catechism preaching is indeed mentioned in the minutes of many circuit meetings (see 5.5 and 5.6). Of course, these reports on the neglect of the Catechism also underscore the (symbolic) importance of it for the community.

Memorisation of the Catechism was required for becoming a communicant member of the church (Gerstner, 1991: 32), but in the late eighteenth century they were largely replaced by Abraham Hellenbroek's *Het voorbeeld der godlyke waarheden* (1706) (32). From around 1806, the Catechism as catechetical tool became less prominent largely because of the rise in the use of the "Kort begrip", although other catechism books also became more popular (Oberholzer, 7; Van der Merwe, 2014: 236).

In 1824, when the first Cape Synod constituted, it recommended both the Catechism and "Kort begrip" as fundamental books for religious teaching, even though it allowed room for the use of other books, among them Hellenbroek's catechesis book. In practice, however, Oberholzer holds that this meant that the Catechism was replaced by the "Kort Begrip" and other books (Oberholzer, 7). Van der Merwe's (2014) overview of the use of the Catechism in catechesis shows that the DRC only took a firm stand for the Catechism in 1966, stipulating that the full text of the Heidelberg Catechism ought to be included and used as basis (2014: 239).

### *1.6.2. A community embedded in the Heidelberg Catechism*

It can be argued that the institutional position of the Catechism in the DRC facilitated a *physical* or *embodied* presence of this text in the community. Some aspects of this community's communal life were organised around the Heidelberg Catechism adding weight to the memories connected to it. This embeddedness in the text is also clear in the DRC's recollections of its own history.

Reminiscences about the earliest Reformed communities in South Africa often include references to practices regarding the Catechism. An 1895 article discussing the history of the church between 1732 and 1744 tells of the trying times the church had experienced<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Uit dit verhaal blijkt, dat tweehonderd jaren na de stichting der Kolonie slechts vijf gemeenten waren ontstaan - voorwaar geen teken van bijzonderer bloei!... Aan de opvoeding der jeugd kon uit den aard der

and the bleak reality of education. Despite the circumstances, and even as a way to oppose it, the Heidelberger was taught:

Nog altijd werden de Catechisatie op den Zondag middag gehouden, en moesten de vragen in den Heidelbergschen Catechismus bij beurten door de kinderen worden beantwoord. D'Ailly bijv. keurde de gewoonte zeer goed: 'Zoo maar het opzeggen van de vragen voor den voorlezer (door nalatigheid van de ouders) niet in verval mocht komen.' Men wilde niet 'dat de kinderen, zoo Europeaansche als slaven, door den voorlezer werden ondervraagd, als hij begon voortelesen, gelijk op Batavia.' Alleen wilde men dat zulks 'op de gevoeligste en stichtelijkste wijze zou worden gedaan.' Doch met dit al was het tegen het midden der 18de eeuw uiterst treurig gesteld met de opvoeding (GM 1895: 20).<sup>25</sup>

Another telling example of the embeddedness of the text in the life of the DRC comes from reports published in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* of 1901 about the prisoners of war sent to India at the time of the South African War (1899–1901). D.J. Viljoen, who accompanied the prisoners as chaplain, recorded that worship services were held aboard the ship on the way to India, and that Sunday afternoons were the dedicated time for discussing the Heidelberg Catechism, together with teaching on faith and morality (Viljoen, 1901a: 345). In another report, he writes of his intention to also teach the Catechism once they have reached the assigned camp (Viljoen 1901b: 389)<sup>26</sup> and later W. De Vos de Wet reported that it indeed happened so (De Wet 1901: 427).

## 1.7. Some preliminary remarks

### 1.7.1. *Unique but identical: the dilemma with the triplet of Dordt*

One thing that will be clear throughout the study is that the memory or reception of the Heidelberg Catechism is not something that can be studied, questioned or analysed in

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zaak niet veel gedaan worden; ofschoon men zorgde dat het godsdienstonderwijs niet geheel verwaarloosd werd" (GM 1895: 20)

<sup>25</sup> The catechesis has always been held on the Sunday afternoon, and questions had to be answered by children by taking turns. D'Ailly, e.g., approves this habit wholeheartedly: "So the reciting of the questions for the reader (because of the parents' negligence) should not come into disrepair.' One does not 'want the children to be interrogated, in such a European way as slaves, by the reader, as in Batavia.' One only wants it 'to be done in the most sensitive and edifying way.' But with all this, by the middle of the 18th century, the education was in a woeful state.

<sup>26</sup> He also states that the Catechism will have to do instead of the "Kort begrip" because of the fact that they have no books.



isolation. Despite the prominent position of the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC and the fact that it was much better known and more often used in preaching and teaching than the other Dutch Reformed confessions, there was a propensity throughout the period to use the Formulae of Unity rhetorically and theologically as a singular entity. The tendency to see three distinct Reformed confessional documents as a unity can of course be linked to the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) as an important marker for Reformed theology in the Netherlands, together with the subsequent subscription formula by which office bearers were required to commit themselves to this group of documents.

Despite this tendency to bundle confessions together, there are examples of articles that acknowledge and emphasise the differences between the Formulae in terms of historical origin, purpose and character. In the cases where the distinction is made, it provides a useful and balanced picture of the Catechism.<sup>27</sup>

### *1.7.2. The Formulae of Unity as rhetorical entity*

Despite the aforementioned examples of distinction, large parts of the archival material referred to in the rest of the study do not make much distinction between the confessions when used rhetorically. This gives the impression that although the Catechism is praised for being unique among catechisms and the history of its origin deemed important, its specificity is mostly overlooked and purposefully negated in matters of theological dispute. In the events and discourses where the confessions are most vehemently and historically influentially used, they are rendered homogeneous in terms of function, trait and significance. The Catechism is almost always remembered via the Synod of Dordt as a constituent element of the Formulae of Unity and, as will become clear in the course of the study, it became increasingly intertwined with the memory of various theological disputes and other historical meanings. The Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory in the DRC, one can argue, is co-constructed by the memory of the Synod of Dordt.

Although this lack of distinction can be said to be theologically problematic, in my opinion it is this very historical and mnemonic development that lends the Catechism the weight

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<sup>27</sup> This includes articles dealing with the origins and history of the Catechism (GM, 1913a: 40-41; GM, 1913b: 134-136), praising its uniqueness as a catechism (GM, 1893b: 6; GM, 1915: 107; Anonymous, 1863: 92; Du Plessis, 1932f: 271; Anonymous, 1900: 566; GM, 1898: 131), its authors, Zacharius Ursinus (M, 1863a: 76-78; M, 1863b: 91-93; M, 1863c: 105-106; M, 1863d: 136-137; M, 1863e: 156-157; Wessels, 1933: 441-442) and Caspar Olevianus (GM, 1899: 192-193; GM, 1913c: 74-76), the role of Frederik III (GM, 1899b: 158-159; GM, 1899c: 175-176; GM, 1913d: 54-55), the content of the Catechism (GM, 1898: 158-159; GM, 1913e: 120-122; GM, 1915: 107-109), as well as the Synod of Dordt and its endorsement of the Catechism (GM, 1893a: 120-121).



it has in the DRC's memory. In other words, this is not only a historically interesting phenomena, but in fact, I would argue, the very thing which establishes and determines the authority of the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC. The endorsement it obtained *in* the past, together with the (supposed) influence it had *on* the past, is what thrusts the Catechism into the present and the future of a community as something important and meaningful. At the same time, the community linking itself to this document and its past is somehow sanctioned and given an identity that withstands the changes associated with the flow of time and sees itself to continue successfully in time.

Of course, this phenomenon should not be interpreted in isolation from the reception of the Formulae in the Netherlands. Jasper Vree provides a valuable oversight of the development and functioning of the Formulae as a unity in the Dutch context (2007; 2009). He shows that even though the Formulae represented “onvervalste rechtzinnigheid die teruggaat op die Synode van Dordt in 1618-1619”<sup>28</sup> (2009: 119) in orthodox-reformed Dutch circles, the bundling together of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt as “the three formulae of unity” is not a development of the seventeenth century, but of the nineteenth century (2009: 119; 2007: 3). Moreover, for two centuries, the Formulae were not published as a single text and the church books of the time (and most of the books of the nineteenth century) mostly contained only the Catechism – sometimes the Belgic Confessions but never the Canons of Dordt (2009: 120; 2007: 3). According to Vree, knowledge of the Canons of Dordt among congregants as well as theological students was almost non-existent (2009: 120) because so little copies were available (2007: 3). The first complete edition of the Formulae of Unity only saw the light two years after the *Afscheiding* of 1834 (2009: 120; 2007: 4).<sup>29</sup> Although two other editions were also published up until 1846,<sup>30</sup> Vree questions their popularity on the basis that none of them saw a reprint and Molenaar's work was partly unsold (2007: 4).

These facts disrupt the popularised memory of the Formulae in South Africa and the historical continuity it aims to serve. The Formulae are generally recalled as arriving in South Africa together with Jan van Riebeeck. In 1963, for example, Jooste writes that

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<sup>28</sup> “unadulterated orthodoxy which formed the backbone at the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619”

<sup>29</sup> *Formulieren van eenigheid der Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland. Met eene voorrede uitgegeven door H.P. Scholte, Bedienaar des Goddeliken Woords, Amsterdam/'s-Gravenhage. 1836.*

<sup>30</sup> *De Formulieren van eenheid, bij de Hervormde Kerk in Nederland gebruikelijk, zuivere bijbelleer; door D. Molenaar, Hervormd leraar te 's-Gravenhage, Amsterdam. 1837. Libri symbolici Ecclesiae Reformatae Nederlandicae, edidit H.E. Vinke, Trajecti ad Rhenum 1846.*

... toe die nedersetting aan die Kaap in 1652 gestig is, is die kerklike lewe alhier onder hierdie bepaling van Dordrecht georganiseer en daarmee ook die Heidelbergse Kategismus as deel van die Drie Formuliere van Enigheid na hierdie land oorgebring<sup>31</sup> (Jooste, 1963: 317-318).

### 1.7.3. *Remembering the Synod of Dordt*

The Synod of Dordt can be seen as an identity marker of the DRC in its own right. To grasp the full meaning of it for the DRC would therefore ask for a proper analysis – something which falls outside the scope of this study. Only a few observations will be made here in this regard.

According to Van Trigt and Wallet (2009), the Synod of Dordt did not occupy the same space in the Reformed memory in the Netherlands than, for example, the Reformation, Luther or Calvin did, but was only the concern of the orthodox Reformed – albeit the case that competing claims were made in the name of a shared heritage (2009: 53).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, claiming the Synod of Dordt as an identity marker only happened since the nineteenth century (54). In fact, as late as 1817, the minister of Leiden, Nicolaas Schotsman, observed that despite the fact that the Reformation was commemorated with much festivity (*tamtam*), Dordt was forgotten (54). However, when it did rise to prominence, mainly through supporters of the *Afscheiding*, a “return to Dordt” was seen as necessary for the reparation of the Dutch church (55). Later Abraham Kuyper, too, appropriated the Synod of Dordt as an identity marker and as such it became associated with the identity politics of Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism (“Neogereformeerden”) (56). However, with Kuyper, according to Van Trigt and Wallet, the memory of Dordt entered a new phase. The initial emphasis that loyalty to Dordt implies returning to the past was in conflict with the prevailing progress discourse (56). Under Kuyper’s influence then, Dordt was overturned to come to be viewed in a utopian context – “Het was niet langer ‘terug na Dordrecht’, maar ‘vooruit mét Dordrecht’, waarmee het beroep op Dordrecht in het kader van een eigen variant van het vooruitgangsgeloof kwam te staan” (56). Eventually, the Synod of Dordt increasingly became a marker in the prolonged struggle between the orthodox and the liberal viewpoints (57).

The meaning of Dordt in South Africa should be understood against the aforementioned

<sup>31</sup> ... when the settlement at the Cape was founded in 1652, the church life was already organised under this stipulation of Dordt and with it the Heidelberg Catechism as part of the Three Formulae of Unity brought to this country.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the memory of the Synod of Dordt, see Goudriaan, A. and van Lieburg, F. eds., 2010. *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)* (Vol. 49). Brill.

background – especially in the light of the importance attributed to it by Kuyper. As mentioned earlier, the ideals of the Synod of Dordt as expressed through the Church Order of Dordt and the Formulae of Unity played an important role in the DRC right from the start – even if the Church Order was only implicitly followed in the drafting of the DRC’s first Church Order in 1824.

But the Synod of Dordt also occupied a place in the memory of the DRC apart from the Church Order. At the time of the Liberal Struggle (see chapter 2), during which the Heidelberg Catechism, first of all, became a point of contention, parts of the minutes of the Synod of Dordt (Session 148) are quoted and published at length under the heading *Oordeelvellingen over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (1867a: 392-393). Somewhat later, in January 1868, the very same section is quoted and published again (Anonymous, 1868: 27-28). Like the liberals, the Remonstrants is said to have tabled their objections against the Catechism, but the Synod of Dordt, of course, firmly rejected it and affirmed the Catechism.

In 1919, the importance of celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dordt is motivated on the basis of gratitude – not commemorating it will be an expression of ungratefulness towards God for what He has given the Church through the fathers of Dordt (GM, 1919: 113-115). Interestingly, the vast (geographical) distance between Dordrecht and the Cape is mentioned, but the need for celebration is expressly supported *despite* that distance (113).

An article in *De Kerkbode* (Marais, 1919: 260-261) makes even more of this date and commemoration: 1919 is depicted as not only a time to commemorate the Synod of Dordt, but also the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Zwingli’s first sermon in the “Groote Kerk” of Zurich. The DRC is called upon not to let this moment of “kostelijke herinneringe”<sup>33</sup> slip from them, for “1519, 1619 en 1919 behooren bij elkaar”<sup>34</sup> (261). This serves as a pertinent example of how the distant past is wilfully brought into the present through acts of commemoration.

The Synod is remembered as bestowing “een erfenis van onschatbare waarde”<sup>35</sup> on the Reformed progeny by the drafting of the Canons and the approbation of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession (GM, 1919: 113). Following H.H. Kuyper, the Synod is praised for the fact that it made “de zuivere Gereformeerde religie ... tot het hechte

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<sup>33</sup> “priceless memories”

<sup>34</sup> “1519, 1619 and 1919 belong together”

<sup>35</sup> “an invaluable legacy”

cement”<sup>36</sup> (115).<sup>37</sup> The Calvinism defended and promoted by the Synod, argues *De Kerkbode*,

... is niet de leer van den natuurlijken mensch ... En juist omdat zij in alles Gode de eer wenscht te geven wordt zij door oppervlakkige denkers, door de vrijzinnige wereld, door eenzijdige godgeleerden aan de verachting prijs gegeven<sup>38</sup> (Anonymous, 1919: 353).

On 30 October 1919, the Cape Synod commemorated the anniversary of Dordt, with D.G. Malan, E.E van Rooyen and A.A. Moorrees as speakers. Malan remembers Dordt as “een epoch-makende gebeurtenis”<sup>39</sup> in the history of the Reformed churches and a victory for “de rechtzinnigheid”<sup>40</sup> after “lange en somtijds bittere geschillen en twisten”<sup>41</sup> (Malan, 1919: 1). It was also the moment at which the Reformed confessions received “haar vasten vorm, welken zij behouden heeft door al de wisselingen van de laatste drie eeuwen heen tot op den huidigen dag”<sup>42</sup> (1). Malan therefore regards it appropriate but also obligatory that the DRC pauses in the significant moment that is 1919 (1). Interestingly, A.A. Moorrees in his speech critically recalled the tendency to see the decisions of Dordt as infallible (Moorrees, 1919: 15-21).<sup>43</sup>

Dordt is set against the background of the Eighty Years’ War – a war that Malan remembers as a struggle for freedom amid oppression and persecution (Malan, 1). For Malan, it is also a singular moment:

‘t Was een heldentijdperk, zooals dagen van vervolging mogelijk alleen te voorschijn roepen. En opmerkelijk is het, dat juist in dezen tijd onze Belijdenisschriften ontstaan zijn, en onze Geref. Godsdienst zijn echten

<sup>36</sup> “the pure Reformed religion ... into a solid cement”

<sup>37</sup> An article of H.H. Kuyper was quoted and closely followed as summary of the significance of Dordt: 1) being the only Synod of the Protestant church portraying the ecumenical character of the church; 2) dealing appropriately with the issue that was threatening to divide the church and the state, it saved the unity of the nation; and 3) it upheld and enforced the teaching of the sovereign grace of God anew as the foundation of the church and the central truth of the Reformation, and the cornerstone of the Gospel when the old dispute between Pelagius and Augustine raised its head again.

<sup>38</sup> ... is not the doctrine of the normal man ... And precisely because he wishes to honour God in everything, he is exposed to contempt by superficial thinkers, by the liberal world, by one-sided theologians.

<sup>39</sup> “an epoch-making event”

<sup>40</sup> “the orthodoxy”

<sup>41</sup> “long and sometimes bitter disputes and quarrels”

<sup>42</sup> “her fixed form, which she retained through all the changes throughout the last three centuries to this day”

<sup>43</sup> “Maar daar zijn ook die zulk een bijna onfeilbaar gezag aan haar besluiten toekennen, dat naar hun oordeel, ieder die het waagt een enkele tittel of iota er van af te doen, voor altoos het recht verbeurt om aanspraak te maken op den naam van Gereformeerde” (Moorrees, 1919: 15).

grondslag verkregen heeft. En is het nu waar, dat het niet aan elke eeuw gegeven is om de waarheid in den vasten vorm van belijdenisschriften of formulieren te gieten, zoo mogen wij onszelf wel gelukkig achten, dat de onze dagteekenen uit zulk roemrijke periode der geschiedenis<sup>44</sup> (1).

For Van Rooyen, too, the struggle for freedom is central, but for him it is a struggle set against the background of Roman Catholic “uniformiteit”<sup>45</sup> and “uiterlijke eenvormigheid”<sup>46</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1919: 5). The Reformers succeeded in returning from “die geestelijke ‘babylonische ballingschap’ van papistische overheersing”<sup>47</sup> and the long period of uniformity spilled over into a period of “steeds klimmende veelvormigheid”<sup>48</sup> (5). This pluriformity, however, is only an external matter, willed by God:

De innerlijke, geestelijke eenheid der ware geloovigen bleef toch voortbestaan, maar in de uiterlijke verschijningsvorm de Kerk kwam er verscheidenheid. God mint de verscheidenheid. En evenals Hij in de natuur verscheidenheid in de dieper eenheid der dingen gelegd had, liet Hij in Zijn voorziening bestel nu dit beginsel ook op kerkelijk gebied doorwerken. Er kwam nuanceering<sup>49</sup> (5).

As we will also see in chapter 4, it is not clear what the meaning of “spiritual unity” is for Van Rooyen, or who he saw included in this unity. For him, the Synod of Dordt was the “waterscheiding van het Calvinistisch-protestantsche christendom”<sup>50</sup> (14). From it flowed the “crystal-clear, life-giving, thirst quenching water of the Reformed religion over a big part of the lives of European people” (14). But earlier in his speech, the Calvinist identity emerging from Dordt seems more particular and simultaneously also purer:

Het goud der zuivere gereformeerde heilsleer werd er uit de mijn der Heilige Schrift opgedolven, verwerkt en tot gangbare munt gestempeld... Zij [the Synod of Dordt] toch heeft voor ons de relatief zuiverste formuleering der christelijke heilswaarheden gegeven, van alle kerkvergaderingen die er ooit in de Protestantsche Kerken gehouden zijn geworden. Het Calvinisme dat uit de

<sup>44</sup> It was a heroic era, as possibly days of persecution alone bring about. And it is remarkable that exactly during this time our Confessions originated, and our Reformed Religion obtained his true basis. And it is now true that it is not given to every era to cast the truth into fixed forms of confessions or formulae, so we may deem ourselves fortunate, that this is our date in such a glorious period of history.

<sup>45</sup> “uniformity”

<sup>46</sup> “outward uniformity”

<sup>47</sup> “The spiritual ‘Babylonian exile’ of papist domination”

<sup>48</sup> “still growing multiformity”

<sup>49</sup> The inner, spiritual unity of true faith does remain, but in the outward appearance of the Church, variety emerged. God willed the variety. And just as He instilled diversity in nature in the deeper unity of things, He now instills in His provision the same principle on the terrain of the church. This brought about nuance.

<sup>50</sup> “watershed of the Calvinist-protestant Christendom”

smeltkroes van stryd en twist opnuut gelouterd te voorschijn trad, is wat getalsterkte van aanhangers betref niet een van die grootste geestesstrominge van die moderne tyd, maar wat sy diepte van wêreldbeskouing, sy diepte van godsdienstige oortuiging, sy diepte en ernst van lewensbeskouing betref, doet dit voor geen geestesrigting onder. Wat dié stroom aan wydte verlore het, het hy aan diepte gewonne<sup>51</sup> (6).

The memory of Dordt directly influenced the importance that the Church Order of Dordt had for the DRC. In the run-up to the long awaited reunification of the Dutch Reformed Churches in 1962 (see 5.7), the degree in which this was regarded as a moment of restoration for the church was reflected in the ways the new church order was praised. In *Die Kerkbode* of November 1959, W.D. Jonker starts a series of articles discussing the new church order. The first of these articles carries the subtitle “’n Voorwaartse stap op Dordtse Grondslag”<sup>52</sup> (Jonker, 1959: 795 ff). Jonker’s discussion reveals an interesting case of “progress on the basis of return.” For the sake of the interwoven nature of these arguments, I quote Jonker at length:

[D]ie gewigtige stap [is] gedoen om eenparig ’n konsep-kerkorde vir die regering van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke goed te keur, ’n kerkorde wat nie alleen moet dien as basis vir die organiese eenwording van die huidige vyf selfstandige gefedereerde N.G. Kerke nie, maar wat ook ongetwyfeld sal dien om die Gereformeerde karakter van ons Kerke te bestendig en te bevestig. Ons kan maar net met die diepste dankbaarheid hierin die hand van die Here sien, en ons kan nie anders as om daarin ’n blyk te sien van die feit dat Christus, die Hoof van die Kerk, nog met ons besig is en veral in hierdie afgelope jare ons Kerke geseën het met ’n nuwe bloei en ’n nuwe liefde vir alles wat Bybels-verantwoord is ... Die Dordtse Kerkorde is immers sonder enige twyfel die beste en suiwerste historiese formulering en samevatting van die Skriftuurlike beginsels waarop die Gereformeerde kerkregering rus, en ten spyte van enkele artikels wat met die oog op die verandering van die tyd deur ons anders geformuleer sal moet word, is die Dordtse Kerkorde nog onaangestas in sy prestiege as ’n deur-en-deur Bybels-Gereformeerde kerkorde. Ek is nie in staat om te sê hoe enige Kerk wat werklik gereformeer wil wees, by die opstel van ’n nuwe kerkorde aan die beginsels en selfs formuleringe

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<sup>51</sup> “The gold of pure reformed doctrine of salvation is excavated from the Holy Scripture, processed and stamped to valid currency ... They [the Synod of Dordt] still gave us the relatively purest formulation of the Christian truths of salvation, of all the church meetings ever held in the Protestant Churches. The Calvinism which emerged newly refined from the melting pot of struggle and strife is, considering its number of supporters, not one of the biggest spiritual currents of the modern era, but when it comes to its depth of worldview, its depth of religious conviction, its depth and earnestness of philosophy of life, it did what no other spiritual direction had. What this current lost in width, it gained in depth.”

<sup>52</sup> “a step forward on the Dordt foundation”

van die Dordtse Kerkorde verby sou kon gaan nie. Daarom is ons innig dankbaar teenoor ons actuarii dat hulle by die verrigting van hierdie groot en moeilike taak hulle so nou aangesluit het by hierdie kosbare ou dokument uit die skat van ons gereformeerde erfenis. Daarmee het hulle aan ons Kerk 'n diens bewys wat nie maklik na waarde geskat kan word nie. Met die ou Dordtse Kerkorde is ons Kerk aan die Kaap uit Nederland oorgeplant, en dit is ons ontnem in 'n bewoë tyd van staatsoorheersing oor die Kerk, van algemene verflouing in die waardering van dit wat eg Bybels-gereformeerd kan heet, en in 'n tyd toe ander opvattinge oor die wese en regering van die Kerk die lug deurwaai het. Wat mag ons dankbaar wees dat ons nou weer 'n kerkorde het wat so nou daarby aansluit!

Hierby moet ons egter dadelik opmerk dat ons Kerke, met die verlies van die Dordtse Kerkorde as *dokument*, deur die genade van die Here in hoofsake tog nooit die gees en hoofbeginsels van die Dordtse Kerkorde verloor het nie ... Die Kerk in sy geheel gaan dit eintlik nie eers agterkom as die nuwe kerkorde ingevoer word nie, omdat die stelsel van ons kerkregering in die geheel nie daardeur verander word nie ... Wanneer ons dus die aanvaarding van die nuwe kerkorde 'n historiese gebeurtenis van gewig noem, dan is dit geensins met dieselfde bedoeling as wat die Gereformeerde Kerk se teoloë dit doen nie, nl. asof die nuwe kerkorde nou die eerste stappe op die weg tot 'n gereformeerde stelsel van kerkregering sou wees nie! Nee, dit is wel 'n voorwaartse stap, maar dit is 'n stap op 'n weg waarop die Ned. Geref. Kerk nog altyd was!"<sup>53</sup> (Jonker, 1959: 795-796, 800).

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<sup>53</sup> The difficult step was taken to unanimously approve a concept church order for the government of the Dutch Reformed Church, a church order that should not only serve as basis for organisational unification of the current five independent Dutch Reformed Churches, but will undoubtedly also serve to stabilise and confirm the Reformed character of our Churches. We can only with the deepest thankfulness see God's hand in it, and we cannot but see a sign of the fact that Christ, the Head of the Church, is still busy with us and especially blessed our Churches over the last years with a new bloom and new a love for everything that can be biblically justified ... The Church Order of Dordt is indeed without a doubt the best and purest historical formulation and summary of the Scriptural principles on which the Reformed church government rests, and regardless of some items that we will have to formulate differently with a view on the change of the times, the Church Order of Dordt remains untouched in its prestige as a thoroughly biblically reformed church order.

I am not able to say how any Church that really wants to be reformed can pass by the principles and even formulations of the Church Order of Dordt when compiling a new church order. Therefore, we are eternally grateful toward our actuarii who joined so closely this valuable old document from the treasures of our reformed heritage in the execution of this big and difficult task. Thereby they have shown our Church a service of which the value cannot be estimated easily. With the old Church Order of Dordt our Church in the Cape was transplanted from the Netherlands, and we were deprived of it in a woeful time of state domination over the Church, of general dilution in the appreciation of that which can be truly biblically-reformed, and in a time when other ideas about the nature and government of the Church were floating around. How we may be grateful that we now have a church order again that is so closely aligned with it! With this, however, we should immediately note that our Churches, with the loss of the Church Order of Dordt as document, through the grace of God never lost the primary spirit and main principles of the Church Order of Dordt ... The Church in its entirety will actually not even realise if the new church order is implemented, because the system of our Church government in its entirety will not be changed by it ...



It is striking how Jonker both elevates and downplays the meaning of this event for the DRC. On the one hand, he highlights the importance of the fact that the DRC is now officially founded on the Church Order of Dordt – and he describes it as a document unaffected and untouched by the passing of time. On the other hand, he implies that being officially founded on Dordt is *not* that important as the DRC stayed true to it even when it was not the official basis of its church order. This creates the impression of a concern for continuity of a tradition that was not necessarily well articulated at the time.

It is important to note the date of this article: it is written less than a year before the infamous Sharpeville incident that led to the Cottesloe consultation during which the DRC was severely criticised by members of the World Council of Churches. It is therefore a moment at which the DRC saw itself arriving at the summit of history but confronted by extreme critique, which, to them, was largely incomprehensible.

#### *1.7.4. Metaphors of tradition: “Bewaar het goede pand”*

##### 1.7.4.1. Identity and tradition

In the course of the study, it will become clear how influential underlying (and often unarticulated) understandings of tradition are in the identity formation of the DRC as related to the Heidelberg Catechism as site of memory.

A sermon on the Heidelberg Catechism from 1893 shows the mnemonic entanglement in definitions of tradition particularly well. It furthermore demonstrates how different aspects of what constitutes tradition are conflated when a specific *object* of the tradition (in this case the Heidelberg Catechism) is interpreted. In other words, it shows how one element or symbol of a tradition can represent an entire tradition.

The sermon involved is a Reformation day sermon published in *De Gereformeerde Maandblad* of 1893 (GM, 1893c: 10-13). The focus text is 2 Tim 1: 14 and it provides the predominant metaphor for the sermon: “Bewaar het goede pand dat u toevertrouwd is”.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned above, it serves as a good example of the mnemonic entanglement between different aspects of a tradition, in this case the Heidelberg Catechism and the

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When we thus call the acceptance of the new church order a significant historic event, it is not with the same intention as that with which the Gereformeerde Kerk’s theologians do it, i.e. as if the new church order is now the first steps on the way to a reformed system of church governance! No, it is indeed a step forward, but it is a step on a path on which the Dutch Reformed Church has always been!

<sup>54</sup> “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”



Reformation.

Read as an identity-creating and meaning-creating text, the sermon achieves three ends: firstly, it provides a good illustration of how the memory of the Reformation is linked to the Catechism, and how meaning is transferred from a series of historical events to a specific historical text; secondly, it shows how continuation with the Protestant tradition is created and maintained through memories of the Reformation and, in turn, how the Catechism is instrumentalised towards this goal; and thirdly, it suggests different ways in which a community saw itself as bound to the Catechism, and reasons why it made an effort to propagate and popularise that connection.

On a slightly more concealed level, the text combines two aspects of tradition into one: the goods that constitute the tradition (in this case the supposedly essential principles of the Reformation, and the Catechism) articulated as “het goede pand”, and the transmittance of these goods articulated as “bewaar.”<sup>55</sup>

#### 1.7.4.2. The goods of tradition – “het goede pand”

In the sermon, the Biblical text and its central metaphor are appropriated to serve as a link between three distinct historical moments: the life and times of the apostle Paul and his pupil, Timothy, the 16th century Reformation, and the members of the DRC in 1893.

The “*goede pand*” represents the costly, transmitted and recovered truth – the “*zekerheid*” (“certainty”) of one’s salvation – that is obtained through faith and not through slavish parroting of any religious authority. This “*goede pand*” thus also entails a bounteous freedom: freedom from the pope, priests, humanity, sin, and the devil.

Most significantly, for our purposes, the Heidelberg Catechism is portrayed as being the carrier of this liberating certainty. The text of the Catechism is cited in the fashion of a manifesto:

Vraag hem, die nog gisteren met een bang geweten bij den priester de verzekering moest gaan zoeken, dat de Kerk en door haar God hem vergeeft, waarom hij zich een Christen noemt; en als van iemand door God zelve is vrijgemaakt, klinkt zijn fiere antwoord: “Ik heet een Christen, omdat ik door’t geloof...” (Kat. Zondag 12)... “Vraag hem, wat hem zoo blijmoedig maakt in leven en sterven, en hij antwoord u: ‘Dat ik met lijf en ziel, beide in leven en

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<sup>55</sup> “keep/guard/preserve”

sterven, niet mij maar mij getrouwen Zaligmaker toebehoor...'<sup>56</sup> (Kat. Zondag 1) (11).

Also when dealing with the dangers that lurk in too much freedom – particularly the risk that people can spread their own favourite ideas in the name of the Holy Spirit – the preacher affirms the way in which the Reformation “fathers” have provided for this threat through their emphasis that God’s Spirit and God’s Word are intimately bound together by quoting from the Heidelberg:

Vraag hun, hoe de Gemeente der uitverkorenen wordt bijeen verzameld, en zij antwoorden u: ‘door Gods Geest en Woord.’ (Kat. Zondag 21). Vraag hun, van waar’t geloof komt dat ons een met Christus maakt; en zij antwoorden: ‘Van de Heiligen Geest, die’t geloof in onze harten werkt door de verkondiging des heiligen Evangeliums.’ (Kat. Zondag 25). Vraag hun, hoe zij’t weten dat Jezus Christus hun volkomen Zaligmaker is; en zij antwoorden: ‘uit het heilig Evangelie, ‘t welk Godzelve eerstelijk in’t paradijs geopenbaard heeft, en namaals door de heilige patriarchen en profeten heeft laten verkondigen, en door de offeranden en andere ceremonies der wet laten voorafschaduw, en ten laatste door Zijnen eeniggeboren Zoon vervuld’<sup>57</sup> (Kat. Zondag 6) (GM 1893: 11).

The Catechism’s authority does not seem to be in need of any justification here, and it is straightforwardly quoted as sufficient support for what is said. This use of the Catechism creates a direct link between the Reformation and the Catechism. Moreover, given the earlier reference to Paul, there even seems to be a seamless movement between the (“original” Christian) truth and the Catechism, and an uncomplicated and unproblematic trust in and application of it to support the preacher’s argument. The relation between the Bible and the Catechism (exacerbated by a subscription formula, as we will later see) does not seem to be an issue here. The Catechism is not portrayed as representative of any form of authority, but without complication consolidated with the revered

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<sup>56</sup> Ask him, who yesterday still with his scared conscious had to seek affirmation from the priest, that the Church and through her God forgives him, why he calls himself a Christian; and if someone is freed by God Himself, his fiery answer would be: “I am a Christian, because I believe ...” (Cat. Sunday 12) ... “Ask him, what makes him so joyful in life and death, and he answers: ‘That I in body and soul, both in life and death, do not trust in myself, but in my Saviour (Cat. Sunday 1).

<sup>57</sup> Ask them, how the Congregation of the chosen is gathered, and they answer: ‘through God’s Spirit and Word.’ (Cat. Sunday 21). Ask them, from where does the faith come that makes us one with God; and they answer: ‘From the Holy Spirit, whose faith works in our hearts through the preaching of the holy Evangelism.’ (Cat. Sunday 25). Ask them, how they know that Jesus Christ is their true saviour; and they answer: ‘from the holy Evangelism, that which God first revealed in paradise, and thereafter preached through the holy patriarchs and prophets, and through the sacrifices and ceremonies prefigured/foreshadowed by the law, and finally fulfilled through His only begotten Son (Cat. Sunday 6).

Reformation and its (rediscovered) truth.

#### 1.7.4.3. The transmittance of tradition – “bewaar”

There is a noticeable shift in mood when the preacher changes from the indicative to the imperative. The “*goede pand*” is not only something to know about and appreciate, there is also an urgent need to safeguard and shield (“bewaar”) it. If the “*goede pand*” is to be lost or belied there would be nothing to protect people from moral decay and deterioration (12). The people and the church, it is said, will suffer a great impairment if the day would come when the Gospel of the Reformation is no longer taken to heart (12).

For the preacher, the Heidelberg Catechism plays a central part in keeping the “*goede pand*” safe. When the author encourages his readers to ensure that they truly own the “*goede pand*” he urges:

Rust niet, tot dat gij het onzen vaders kunt nazeggen, dat gij ‘met lijf en ziel, beide in leven en sterven, niet uzelfen maar uwen getrouwen zaligmaker Jezus Christus toebehoort,’ en dat gij ‘door’t geloof een lidmaat van Christus zijt en alzoo Zijner zalving deelachtig’<sup>58</sup> (13).

For the preacher, this is what constitutes the true gospel and it has pristinely been handed down to him and his listeners through the Confessions of the church:

Wat hebben wij niet aan onze voorvaderen te danken, die ten koste van goed en bloed de waarheid hebben vastgehouden, en haar in te belijdenisschriften der kerk aan’t nageslacht zuiver hebben overgeleverd<sup>59</sup> (12).

The link observed here, between the certainty (“*zekerheid*”) attested to in the Heidelberg Catechism, and the purity (“*zuiverheid*”) with which it has been handed down to the church, and, accordingly, should be passed on by her, is important in the text as well as for the purposes of this study. In the sermon, the Heidelberg Catechism itself does not seem to be a marker or giver of identity, but rather a means through which a prior identity – being Protestant – is most purely and directly expressed. The notion of certainty is drawn from the Reformation, but transplanted to the Catechism in its entirety.

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<sup>58</sup> Do not rest, until you can repeat our fathers’ words, that you ‘with body and soul, both in life and death, do not trust in yourself, but in your trustworthy Saviour Jesus Christ,’ and that you ‘are through faith a part of Christ and also partake in His anointment’.

<sup>59</sup> What do we not have our forefathers to thank for, who at the cost of good and blood held firm the truth, and conveyed it purely through the confessions of the church to the offspring.

However, this very identity is also depicted as endangered, and in need of preservation and protection. A central theme in this text is that the Protestant identity is costly and something that is in need of preservation. The age of the Reformation as a so-called response to theological corruptness is portrayed as proof that the truest Christian identity can be corrupted and even be lost, and that brave acts to save it were required throughout history. The community itself is undoubtedly responsible for the preservation.

Furthermore, the sermon creates a clear distinction between the true identity and the continuation and transmittance of it. It also differentiates levels of stability: whereas the original and inherited (true) identity is viewed as untouchable, secure, and an unquestionable truth, the protection and continuation of that identity are considered vulnerable. The ways in which the certainty of faith is coated in language of adoration (“dierbaarheid”, “kosbaarheid”)<sup>60</sup>, seen as a precious gift of God and received only by the grace of God, can be read as illustrative of the awareness of its vulnerability and volatility.

In that sense, the Reformation functioned as both a liberating and a daunting memory: it is rejoicing to know that due to the Reformation, the truth of the certainty of one’s salvation was not lost, but it is very frightening to know that it is indeed possible for that truth to disappear. (*Die erfgoed/erfenis is seker, maar die oorlewering is kwesbaar*).<sup>61</sup> The Reformation presents itself as a fixed point of revealed truth, but somehow it is just never quite anchored and fully present.

## 1.8. Overview of chapters

Chapter 2 analyses and discusses the Heidelberg Catechism as a pivotal aspect of the so-called Liberal Struggle of the 1860s. It provides a short overview of the theological context of the 1860s and focuses on the “outbreak” of the Liberal Struggle at the synod of 1862 connected to a remark about the Heidelberg Catechism by one of the members of the synod. It shows that the preservation of the Reformed heritage was closely connected to the Heidelberg Catechism for both sides of the conflict, and accordingly explicates the different understandings of tradition that are at the heart of this theological conflict. This is achieved, firstly, by a close reading of two texts written by supporters of the so-called orthodox position in the aftermath of the court case between J.J. Kotzé and the DRC. Secondly, the liberal interpretation of the very same court case is sketched by following some of the arguments of the *Kerk Verdedigings Genootschap*. The chapter concludes

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<sup>60</sup> “dearness”, “treasure”

<sup>61</sup> The heritage/inheritance is certain, but the tradition is vulnerable.

with critical reflections on the way in which Andrew Murray and N.J. Hofmeyr have been remembered by the DRC in relation to the Liberal Struggle.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of the Heidelberg Catechism in the infamous Du Plessis case of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In this controversy, the Catechism had a subtler presence than was the case in the theological conflicts of the 1860s. However, it is argued that the memory of the Liberal Struggle had a defining influence on how the Du Plessis case was framed and eventually concluded.

The chapter begins by discussing one particular controversy in the early days of the Du-Plessis case: a debate on the interpretation of 2 Samuel 6 – the wagon of Uzzah. This debate reveals a fundamental underlying tension about the meaning of tradition that laid at the heart of the controversy, and also played a part in the Liberal Struggle. It then turns to a discussion of the ways in which the Du Plessis case was framed as a repetition of the Liberal Struggle. The discussion then turns to more specific arguments that formed part of the Du Plessis case, namely a) arguments about the role of scientific progress in a religious tradition, and b) arguments about the need and desirability of confessional revision. These arguments are collectively interpreted as a tension between transformation and preservation in tradition. In conclusion, an interpretative framework of Jorn Rüsen is discussed as critical reflection.

Chapter 4 deals with the 1930s and 1940s as a period in which the DRC faced social problems specifically caused by widespread poverty and urbanisation. The time was depicted as one of decline and deterioration. The chapter discusses how the DRC responded to the *zeitgeist* by defining itself as a *confessional* church. It also shows how a “return to the past” functioned as a point of stability and orientation and how “heritage” as a concept became a central aspect in the DRC’s identity construction. In defining its heritage, the DRC merged various aspects of its past into one narrative, including Reformed Confessions, Protestant history, Dutch history and South African history.

It also highlights the interplay between past and present in this period. The DRC’s heritage became an important aspect in its self-definition, by also providing a sense of calling and an expectation of the future.

Chapter 5 shows how, despite the widespread focus on the Catechism throughout the period, the DRC’s self-defining rituals as from 1938 did not include the Catechism or the Formulae of Unity in any real sense.

The chapter starts off by discussing the DRC’s formalisation and ritualisation of its history in the late 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. The biblical admonition to “keep thy feasts” became a prominent and well-discussed adage in the pages of *Die Kerkbode* in

that period. This went hand in hand with an awareness that “great nations have big histories” and that it was important that history be preserved, recorded and written. Some of the biggest DRC’s annual feasts and the way they were discussed in *Die Kerkbode* are presented and analysed.

It is then argued that, in comparison to the scope and importance of these annual commemorations for the DRC, the 300<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1963 can be said to have been a non-event. The discussions about the Catechism that were recorded in *Die Kerkbode* at this time are nevertheless analysed and compared to the general way in which the Catechism was remembered in the 15 years preceeding the commemoration.

The last part of the chapter deals with the long-awaited unification of the five DRC synods in 1962. The event did not occur without criticism of the fact that only the white DRC churches were included in this unification process. The chapter concludes by arguing that the DRC’s imagination and understanding of itself, together with its inability to listen to any criticism, were significantly influenced by the commemorative rituals it instituted and maintained.

## Chapter 2

# The Heidelberg Catechism and the memory of the Liberal Struggle (1862–1880)

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the so-called Liberal Struggle that played out in the DRC between 1862 and 1880. As will become clear, the Heidelberg Catechism marked a significant moment in the development of this struggle.

The chapter begins with an overview of the theological context of the 1860s, the outbreak of the Liberal Struggle, the specific role of the Heidelberg Catechism in it, and the eventual court case between the DRC and the state in which it resulted.

Finally, the chapter explicates various interpretations of the outcome of the court case by opposing groups and concludes with a critical evaluation of the theology of main spokesmen of the orthodox party.

## 2.2. The door that had to be closed

The Liberal Struggle was not in essence a controversy about the Heidelberg Catechism. Nevertheless, the Catechism became closely associated with the “outbreak” of this struggle and, in the process, it became a contested entity within the DRC.

### 2.2.1. *The theological context of the 1860s*

The 19th-century developments in Western European theological and philosophical circles also influenced the thinking of the DRC, with the result that some of its ministers were suspected of holding theological ideas that were not in line with what was regarded as Reformed orthodoxy. Although the influx of liberal ideas into the DRC was mainly considered to be connected to the fact that South African ministers received their training abroad (Hanekom, 1951a: 175-177),<sup>62</sup> other reasons for the development of liberalism in

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<sup>62</sup> According to Hanekom (1951a: 175), about 150 residents of the Cape received Dutch academic training

the South African context have also been given by scholars. Among these are the political changes of the 19th century and the changes in laws associated with the work of J.A. de Mist, the social changes brought about by the British rule, the changes in education policies, the rise of the press, the influx of books from abroad, the diversification of the Christian religious scene with the arrival of many denominations, the presence of missionary organisations, and the presence of so-called sects, particularly the Free Masons (Van der Watt, 1980: 31-35). Van der Watt, moreover, mentions the presence of a “gesagsveragterende vryheidsgees”<sup>63</sup> (Van der Watt, 1980: 29), various rumours about “afwyking van die leer” (29) and ample warnings against the “geloofsondermynende dwaalleer” (30) that was heard at the synods of 1852 and 1857 and published in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (30). He mentions these “sielsverdorwende sake”<sup>64</sup> by name:

... loëning van die goddelike inspirasie van die Skrif, ontkenning van die leer van die Drie-eenheid, verwerping van die godheid en middelaarskap van Christus en die minagting van die totale verdorwenheid van die mense (30).<sup>65</sup>

Hanekom, too, argues that liberal tendencies have been well established in South Africa and the DRC by the 1850s (Hanekom, 1951: 157; 168-170).<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, however, a spirit of revival swept through the ranks of the church. According to Van der Watt (1980: 15), the longing for a spiritual renewal in the church had already been present since the first half of the 19th century. These tendencies were stimulated by the American revivals of the time together with the Dutch Réveil.<sup>67</sup> The period preceding the revivals in South Africa is described as a time of “verstarde

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between 1800 and 1875, of which 80 were theological students.

<sup>63</sup> “authority- discarding spirit of freedom”

<sup>64</sup> “soul-depraving matters”

<sup>65</sup> “... disavowal of the godly inspiration of Scripture, denial of the teaching of the Trinity, rejection of the deity and mediation of Christ and the contempt for the total depravation of the people (30).”

<sup>66</sup> Hanekom particularly links the presence of liberalism in South Africa with what he calls the growing “spirit of tolerance” since the 1820s. “Die gees van verdraagsaamheid neem in daardie dae meermale die pleit op vir die verontregte, ook op politieke gebied. Die wederregtelike optrede teen die opstandeling te Graaff-Reinet en Swellendam word skerp afgekeur as ’n voorbeeld van die destydse heersende onverdraagsaamheid. In die nuwe gees is daar dan ook ruimte vir die standpunt van die ander man, veral wanneer hy iets nuuts bring, ’n bydrae ‘voor den voortgang van vrije gevoelens’, wat orals in die wêreld opgemerk word en veral in Amerika gesien word! Ook op godsdienstige gebied word gestrewe na verandering, na meer ‘Liberale en Regtvaardige gevoelens’ teenoor andersdenkendes en teenoor inboorlingrasse veral. ‘Gelukkig voor ons’, so spreek die gees van die tyd, ‘vormt de godsdienst hier geene grond van onderscheid, én Roomsche gezinden én Protestanten zetten vergenoegd in elkanders gezelschap hunnen reis Hemelwaarts voort’” (Hanekom, 1951: 159).

<sup>67</sup> See Elphick 2012: 40-41, J.W. Hofmeyr’s *Die Nederlandse Nadere Reformasie en sy invloed op twee kontinente* (1989) and E.P. Jooste’s doctoral dissertation *Die Nederlandse réveil en die Nederduitse Gereformeerde kerk* (1986).



godsdiensdigheid ... en 'n lusteloosheid in die kerklike bedrywighede"<sup>68</sup> (16), and of "geestelike insinking en oppervlakkigheid"<sup>69</sup> (16). This led devoted ministers to worry about the lack of "warmte van 'n deurleefde geloof"<sup>70</sup> (16)<sup>71</sup>, and to become propagators of the necessity of spiritual awakening (17).<sup>72</sup>

By 1860, enough momentum had been gathered to launch a series of ecumenical Christian conferences, and soon after many communities reported dramatic spiritual upsurge (Elphick, 2012: 41). The revival reached its peak between 1860 and 1862, and for many it was no coincidence that it overlapped with the time when liberal theology became most prominent (Van der Watt, 1980: 20). The Cape Synod of 1862 thoroughly discussed both matters. It approved of the revivals and decided that it should be seen "als een heerlijk werk des Heiliges Geestes, tot redding van zielen, en tot verheerlijking van des Heeren Jezus"<sup>73</sup> (20), and an apt weapon to defend the "pure doctrine" against the "devastating attack of unbelief" (20). To do so, "de banier van's Heeren Geest"<sup>74</sup> (20) was needed. After 1862, however, the interest and fervour for spiritual revival gradually dwindled, and the slackening and shallowing in the religious life of many congregants were often bemoaned in circuit meetings (20).<sup>75</sup>

We have examples of how the revivals were remembered from 1919 and 1930 as an intervention by God amid the Liberal Struggle (OP 1930c: 274). An article, "Het Modernisme in de Kaapse Kerken", by L.M. Kriel that was originally published in 1919 states:

'Donkere dagen ware die, maar ook grote, wonderlike dingen gebeurden. Toen de strijd<sup>76</sup> heftiger werd, was er iets vreemds eensklaps van Hoger Hand in het land gebeurd, dat onder Gods beschikking 'n bron van kracht in de strijd voor velen der orthodoxen werd ... Onmiddellik na de konferentie [in

<sup>68</sup> "rigid religiosity ... and an apathy in the church activities"

<sup>69</sup> "mental decline/spiritual decline and superficiality"

<sup>70</sup> "warmth of an experienced faith"

<sup>71</sup> In the early 1850s, positive reports on the North American revivals were published in both the public and the ecclesial newspapers/press. These revivals were presented as the ideal antidote to the deplorable spiritual condition locally (Van der Watt, 1980: 16).

<sup>72</sup> Among these propagators were G.W.A van der Lingen, A. Faure, J.H. Neethling, N.J. Hofmeyr, and John and Andrew Murray (Van der Watt, 1980: 17).

<sup>73</sup> "as a wonderful work by the Holy Spirit, in saving souls, and glorifying the Lord Jesus"

<sup>74</sup> "the banner of the Lord's Spirit"

<sup>75</sup> In 1876 the Cape Synod decided to appoint a "Commission for Special Gospel preaching" ("Kommissie vir Speciale Evangelieprediking") that worked to keep the idea of revival alive. Special services were held that focused on repentance and conversion. Andrew Murray and Servaas Hofmeyr were particularly instrumental in these services. See Van der Watt 1980: 21ff.

<sup>76</sup> This is a reference to the liberal struggle.

Worcester on 18 April 1860] was de opwekking ook begonnen in Zuid Afrika. Als een golf rolde zy over't land ... Deze opwekking gaf steun aan de orthodoxe party, terwyl de stryd steeds voorgezet werd'<sup>77</sup> (274).

Van der Watt, too, holds that the revival had a positive impact on the DRC. In his opinion, the first half of the 19th century was not that successful in bringing people to certainty of faith. This changed with the spiritual awakening as much emphasis was placed on certainty of faith and sanctification. It brought about a fond and warm piety, and this type of preaching became characteristic of the DRC (1980: 22). But Van der Watt also states that this development was not unambiguously positive. In some instances, it gave rise to superficial emotive preaching ("gevoelsprediking"<sup>78</sup>) and a neglect of covenant theology (22). To this extent not only liberalism became a perceived threat to the DRC, but also Methodism.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, special Pentecostal services became a well-established and very important practice in the DRC. (The memory and importance of these services will again be discussed in chapter 5. See 5.4.1.) However, it is clear that the revivals of the 1860s were a much more contentious issue than Van der Watt purports. In 1870, for example, when the issue of Reformed orthodoxy and its legitimate markers were still very contentious, the question was raised whether the revivals, on the basis of the Formulae, can be judged to be the work of the Holy Spirit or not (DO, 1870: 154). Given the extent to which both Andrew Murray (Jr) and N.J. Hofmeyr were active in the revival movements, and played an immense role in defending Reformed orthodoxy against liberalism, the development of this practice in the DRC indeed asks for more analysis.

Another important event of the 1860s that should be kept in mind is the infamous Loedolff-case.<sup>80</sup> At the Synod of 1862, and on the basis of Ordinance no. 7 of 1843, Rev. Loedolff questioned the legal status of members who resided outside the Cape Colony. Eventually, the High Court ruled that congregations outside the Cape Colony could not

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<sup>77</sup> 'Those were dark days, in which amazing, wonderful things happened. When the fight intensified, something strange suddenly happened by the hand of God in the land, which became a source of power in the fight for many orthodox followers by the will of God. Immediately after the conference [in Worcester on 18 April 1860], the excitement also started in South Africa. As a wave, it swept over the land ... This excitement gave support to the orthodox party, while the fight still continued.'

<sup>78</sup> "emotive preaching"

<sup>79</sup> In addition to American revivalism and the Dutch Réveil, the influence of Scottish pietism on the DRC, too, has been noted and studied. See Coetzee, M. 2013. *Eertydse Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese denkstrome ten grondslag van Beyers Naudé se kritiek op apartheid*. Dutch Reformed Theological Journal/Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif, 54 (3 & 4): 154-168.

<sup>80</sup> See Van der Watt, 1973. *Die Loedolff-saak en die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1862-1962*. Tafelberg Uitgewers: Kaapstad.

legally be part of the DRC. This directly led to the inevitable constitution of the Free State, Natal and Transvaal synods as separate church bodies, thereby weakening the organisational unity of the DRC. Moreover, the event was interpreted as a strategy from the liberals to strengthen their position in the (Cape) church, since the majority of ministers who consequently had to leave the Synod was said to be on the side of the orthodox (Van der Watt, 1980: 36). Nevertheless, the real “spiritual unity” of the DRC was to a great extent not seen to be suppressed by this development (Van der Watt, 1987: 1). Still, despite the many attempts to reunify the DRC churches – starting with the constitution of the *Raad van Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke* in 1905 – it was only in 1962 that the DRC succeeded in bringing the separate synods together in one general synodical structure (see 5.7).

### 2.2.2. *The Synod of 1862*

Because of the perceived impact that liberal theology had already had in the Protestant churches in the Netherlands,<sup>81</sup> members of the DRC became weary of the presence of liberal sentiments in its own ranks. By the early 1860s, the theological tension about this was high. This period has been the object of many studies, thus the aim here is not to re-evaluate liberal theology, its presence in the DRC or the theological or historical interpretation of the period. The focus is rather on the role of the Heidelberg Catechism in this controversy and tracing the development it undergoes in terms of meaning, function, and significance during this time.

The Cape Synod of 1862 proved to be the event where the opposing sides in this struggle finally met head-on. This meeting came to occupy a significant place in the memory of the DRC. It was generally regarded as the moment in which the long-feared liberalism finally and clearly revealed itself as having a definite and influential presence in the DRC. Therefore, it is deeply ingrained in the memory of the DRC – it is even remembered as a meeting as significant as the Synod of Dordt itself (Dreijer, 1898: 5) – and has become a landmark in both the history and historiography of the DRC.<sup>82</sup> Dreyer (1924), for example,

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<sup>81</sup> Van der Watt describes this as follows: “Die kerklik-godsdienstige toestand van Holland het inderdaad gedurende 1750-1850 deurgaans ’n negatiewe tendensie vertoon ten opsigte van teologie, kerk en geloofslawe deurdat die rasionalisme en die liberalisme steeds sterker die botoon gevoer het. 'n Vrysinnige klimaat is geskep: menige kansel is gevul met manne wat vir 'n groot deel die evangeliese leer verwerp het; die kenmerkende leerstukke van die kerk is nie meer geglo nie, of is afgewater; en 'n rasionalistiese gees spreek uit die prediking. Gevolglik was die godsdienstige lewe in die gemeentes tam: godsdiens was slegs 'n saak van Sondag; bekering het 'n verouderde woord geword en veelal is die geloof gesien as die verstandelike instemming met 'n paar godsdienstige waarhede (1980: 28)

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of the memory of the liberal struggle in the historiography of the DRC, see Van Tonder

remembers it in the following way:

De Synode van 1862 is in de geschiedenis der Ned. Ger. Kerk in Zuid- Afrika zeer belangrijk. Immers in die Synode ontbrandde de grote strijd tegen het liberalisme, die de Kerk acht Jaren bezig gehouden heeft. Een geest van leervrijheid begon te verschijnen, die geweigerd heeft zich te laten binden door de belijdenisschriften der Kerk, en die het ene dwaalpunt na het andere heeft ingevoerd met de bepaalde strekking om het gehele Evangelie te ondermijnen<sup>83</sup> (Dreyer, 1924: 114).

Closely read, however, it becomes clear that the outbreak of the crisis, and how it came to be defined and remembered, hinges on both the presence of liberal theology in the DRC at the time *and* the mnemonic associations attached to the Catechism. In other words, the very fact that an outbreak or crisis was experienced is attached to the existence of particular mnemonic associations.

Reports prior to and after the Synod show that theological conflict was anticipated. J.D. Kestell, for example, saw the outbreak of conflict as inevitable though tragic:

Menigeen had met een zwaarmoedig hart de Synode van 1862 tegemoet zien. Het was alsof de Kerk gevoelde, dat zij aan den vooravond stond van gebeurtenissen, die zij niet zonder lijden en verlies zou kunnen doorworstelen<sup>84</sup> (Kestell 1911:99-100).<sup>85</sup>

It appears that members of the church were well aware that individuals with affinity for liberal theology were present in the DRC and this was regarded as a problem that needed to be addressed.<sup>86</sup> A remark by J.J. Kotzé at the Synod of 1862 presented itself as the ideal moment to do so.

The significant moment of this synod for our discussion is the squabble about the Heidelberg Catechism that took place during the 31st session (on 19 November 1862) of the Synod. A report tabled by the committee attending to matters having to do with “upholding the pure doctrine” stated that preaching about the Heidelberg Catechism was

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2014: 211-230.

<sup>83</sup> The Synod of 1862 is very important in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. After all, in the Synod, the big fight against the liberalism flared up, which kept the Church occupied for eight years. A spirit of freedom of learning started emerging, which refused to let it be bound to the confessional writings of the Church, and it has imported one digression after another with the particular aim to undermine the entire Gospel.

<sup>84</sup> Many faced the Synod of 1862 with a heavy heart. It was as if the Church felt that she was at the eve of events, which she could not struggle through without suffering and loss.

<sup>85</sup> For a similar recollection, see Moorrees 1937: 898, 919.

<sup>86</sup> Van der Watt writes that, at the time, about 25 ministers represented liberal theology in one way or another, and also that it took little effort to ascertain who they were (1980: 30).

to be understood as “eene uitlegging van de vragen en antwoorden, en eene VERDEDIGING derzelve op grond van Gods Woord”<sup>87</sup> (Dreijer, 1898: 22). As a member of the Synod, J.J. Kotzé – the minister of Darling – objected to this by opining that the answer to question 60 (“and still inclined to all evil”) of the Catechism contains language “die niet eens in den mond van een heiden waarheid zou bevatten of hij moest een duivel zijn, veel minder nog in dien van den christen”<sup>88</sup> (Dreijer, 1898:22). The remark was viewed as a severe transgression and attack on the church:

Dese woorden waren als een vuurbrand geworpen in het vlas; het was een *casus belli*, eene oorlogsverklaring. Daarbij kon het niet gelaten worden. Ds. Kotzé had de leer der Kerk aangerand<sup>89</sup> (Dreijer, 1898: 22-24).

In 1911, J.D. Kestell had equally dramatic recollections of the event. For him, Kotzé’s remark led to “a raging storm” against which the DRC simply had to defend itself (Kestell, 1911: 97). For the Synod, the only appropriate way to deal with it was to give Kotzé the opportunity (in fact, various opportunities) to retract his comment or else face the consequences. Because he was not willing to renounce his opinion, Kotzé was discharged from his office – the first time ever the DRC took this action.

The moderator of the Synod, Andrew Murray (Jr), conveyed his regret that the decision to expel Kotzé had to be taken. In his speech, he states how hard it is for him to be the one having to make this decision, but affirms its necessity: “Wij moeten tot een allerplechtigste plicht overgaan – een werk dat indien ik mij niets vergis, nog nimmer in de Kerk van Zuid-Afrika verricht is”<sup>90</sup> (Du Plessis, 1920: 228). After a long and prayerful deliberation, he continues, the Synod decided that Kotzé was guilty of heresy and therefore came to believe that he was not fit for office. The moment is depicted as a time where the church has to submit itself to God: “Biddend en ootmoedig moeten wij in dit oogenblik opzien tot de Heer der gemeente. Die meent te staan zie toe dat hij niet valle”<sup>91</sup> (Du Plessis 1920:228).

Kotzé’s remark seems to be at the centre not only of the orthodox’s memory of this

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<sup>87</sup> “one interpretation of the questions and answers, and one DEFENCE thereof in terms of God’s Word”

<sup>88</sup> “which would not even contain truth in the mouth of a pagan unless he is a devil, much less in that of the Christian”

<sup>89</sup> “These words were cast as a burning fire into the flax; it was a *casus belli*, a declaration of war. In addition, it could not be ignored. Rev. Kotze had assaulted the doctrine of the Church.”

<sup>90</sup> “We should do our most solemn duty – a task which, if I am not mistaken, has never been undertaken in the Church of South Africa.”

<sup>91</sup> Prayerfully and humbly we must look in this moment to the Lord of the Church. He who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

theological struggle, but also that of the liberals.<sup>92</sup> An 1871 article in *De Onderzoeker* compares the doctrine of the pope's infallibility to orthodox Protestantism's use of both the Bible and the Formulae (Anonymous, 1871: 85-86). The Synod of 1862 is presented as the example par excellence that the orthodox, too, uphold the doctrine of infallibility:

Wat men ook zegge, hoe men in theorie de zaak ignoreert, de Gereformeerde Kerk heeft door het vaststellen van de leer der kerk en door de idee van een alleen zaligmakend geloof feitelijk aanspraak gemaakt op onfeilbaarheid. De onverbiddelijke gestrengheid, waarmede de confessionalisten zich aan de dogmata der kerk vastklemmen, waarin zij niet dulden willen dat een jota of tittel worde veranderd, de stoutheid waarmede zij iedere afdwaling van de kerkleer eenvoudig voor ongeloof verklaren, is bewijs genoeg dat zij veronderstellen dat de kerkleer onmogelijk verkeerd kan zijn en dat dus hare opstellers, in dit opzicht althans, onfeilbaar waren. De storm, die in de Synode van 1862 tegen den Predikant van Darling losbrak omdat hij zeide: de Katechismus is hier verkeerd, laat zich alleen rijmen met de suppositie dat de orthodoxen onfeilbaarheidsmannen waren. Werpen zij dit van zich, dan halen zij zich slechts iets op den hals wat nog erger is. Of hoe durven menschen, die van geene onfeilbaarheid willen hooren, zich zulke meedoogenlooze oordeelvellingen over een medebroeder veroorloven als die er o.a. gevallen zijn van Professor Hofmeijr. Ware de zaak niet zoo ernstig, zij zou een schoon onderwerp uitmaken voor een spotdicht<sup>93</sup> (86).

Another significant example of the centrality of this memory is Kotzé's proposal at the Synod of 1873 that the decision of 1862 (on what is meant by preaching on the Catechism) be revoked. It seems that for the liberals, the DRC made positive progress over the eleven years that had passed, and that they were ready to make better decisions. Kotzé's appeal for revoking the decision was not successful. *De Onderzoeker* commented on Kotzé's proposal as follows:

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<sup>92</sup> The terms "orthodox" and "liberal" are used throughout this chapter as shorthand for distinguishing the two sides of the struggle. The terms do not indicate theological interpretation or judgement from the author.

<sup>93</sup> Whatever one may say, however one ignores the matter in theory, the Reformed Church has through determining the doctrine of the church and through the idea of one faith of deliverance practically claimed infallibility. The implacable rigour, with which the confessions cling to the dogma of the Church, in which they will not permit the changing of a jot or a tittle, the boldness with which they declare any digression from the Church doctrine simply as impiety, is proof enough that they presume that the Church doctrine cannot possibly be wrong and that its authors, in this case at least, are infallible. The storm, which broke out in the Synod of 1862 against the Reverend from Darling because he said: the Catechism is wrong here, makes sense if one assumes that the orthodox were men of infallibility. If they cast it from themselves, they only bring something worse upon themselves. Or how dare people, who do not want to hear about any infallibility, pass such pitiless judgment on a confrère as, amongst others, was the case with Professor Hofmeijr. Had the matter not been so serious, it would make a wonderful subject for a satire.

Toen deze bepaling in 1862 werd vastgesteld, waren er zeker onder de leden der Synode velen, die wegens onbekendheid met den werkelijke inhoud der vragen en antwoorden van den Catechismus eerlijk konden meenen dat zij alle verdedigbaar waren op grond van Gods Woord. Maar nu is er in het laatste tiental jaren zooveel licht verspreid - nu is de onhoudbaarheid van menige bewering in den Catechismus zoo herhaaldelijk in het licht gesteld, dat de poging alleszins gerechtvaardigd is om, met een beroep op het geweten der leden van de aanstaande Synode, de ongerijmde bepaling van 1862 te doen opheffen<sup>94</sup> (Anonymous 1873: 72).

How did Kotzé's remark about the Catechism come to occupy this central place in the Liberal Struggle? To understand that, we need to follow more closely the arguments that led to and followed his dismissal.

### *2.2.3. The meaning of tradition*

First, it is important to note that the synod did not unanimously come to its conclusion to expel Kotzé. M. Versfeld, a member of the church council of Darling's congregation, points this out in his defence of Kotzé. He (Versfeld, 1864: 15) emphasises the fact that, on 25 November 1862, the Synod had declared that Kotzé "aan de uitdrukking 'dat ik nog steeds tot alle boosheid geneigd ben' eenen ongerijmden zin opdringt; met andere woorden: dat hij het door hem betredene gevoel ten onregte voor de Catechismusleer houdt".<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Versfeld, who wrote to W. Robertson (the scribe of the Synod) on behalf of the church council of Darling, is flabbergasted by the fact that Robertson later accused Kotzé of "rondborstige bestrijding van den Catechismus"<sup>96</sup> (15) after the Synod had declared that "wat onze leeraar bestrijdt *niet* is de Catechismus-leer, maar slechts eene meening die hij zich inbeeldt de Catechismusleer te zijn"<sup>97</sup> (15).

Versfeld also affirmatively recalls Kotzé's respect for the Catechism conveyed in his

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<sup>94</sup> When this provision was adopted in 1862, there were certainly many members of the Synod, who due to unfamiliarity with the actual content of the questions and answers of the Catechism could honestly believe that they were justified on the basis of God's Word. But now so much light has spread in the last ten years – light has now repeatedly been shed on the unsustainability of many contentions in the Catechism that the attempt is quite justified, with an appeal to the conscience of the members of the forthcoming Synod, to abolish the absurd ruling of 1862.

<sup>95</sup> "through the expression 'that I am still prone to all evil' noted an absurd sentence; in other words: that he keeps to the Catechism's doctrine despite his feelings that the aforementioned is unjust"

<sup>96</sup> "outright challenging of the Catechism"

<sup>97</sup> "what our reverend does not challenge, is the Catechism doctrine, but only one opinion which he imagines to be the Catechism doctrine"



defence of himself before the Synod, thereby disputing the image of Kotzé as a dissenter:

... dat hij eerbied had voor den Catechismus, in eene billijke waardeering van dat leerboek voor niemand wenschte onder te doen, van harte de hooge voortreffelijkheid van dat geschrift erkende, dat hij niet 'de doorlopende leer van den Catechismus' over de verdorvenheid des menschen had bestreden, maar slechts eene enkele uitdrukking die met de doorlopende leer in strijd is, en dat hij dit had gedaan niet om den Catechismus in minachting te brengen, maar omdat hij daardoor den Catechismus, dien hij hoogachtte, in waarde wenschte te doen rijzen<sup>98</sup> (Versfeld, 15).

What complicated the matter, though, was the fact that Kotzé had continued to argue against Sunday 23 of the Catechism. For him, it contradicted the Bible and other parts of the Catechism itself. His (Kotzé, 1864a: 3-7) point was that question and answer 60 are both unbiblical and unreformed. This made it clear that Kotzé was not going to retract, and also that he was ready to actively debate the matter. For the orthodox, this was a continuation of the violation against the church already committed at the Synod of 1862, but the liberals were adamant that room for such enquiries and debates were indeed part of what constituted Protestantism.

A further complication was the fact that, in 1864, Andrew Murray admitted that Kotzé's remark did not really constitute any form of heresy, but that the more important issue at stake was whether it would have opened the door to heresy or not:

... dat er geene ketterij gepleegd was, en dat het ook niet beweerd werd dat er zulk eene ketterij was gepleegd, maar dat het de vraag was of men de deur zou openzetten voor ketterij. Het was niet de vraag of giftplant zelf was ingevoerd; maar of men toelaten zal dat het zaad van die giftplant wijd en zijd zou worden uitgestrooid? Zou men wachten totdat men, zich van de gedulde vrijheid bedienende, de goddelijke ingeving der Heilige Schrift, de regvaardigmaking door het geloof, het volkomen bederf van den zondaar, openlijk loochende en bestreed? En dat zou er van komen als men een leeraar

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<sup>98</sup> ... he had respect for the Catechism, a sincere appreciation for the doctrine which he wishes no one to do without, openly admitting the eminence of the manuscript, that he never challenged the overarching doctrine of the Catechism about the depravity of man, but only one expression which is contrary to the overarching doctrine, and that he did not do it to bring the Catechism into disrepute, but because he wanted to raise the desired value of the Catechism, which he holds in high esteem.



die op zijn regt stond om te zeggen: ‘De Katechismus is verkeerd,’ in de kerk toeliet<sup>99</sup> (DO, 1864a: 44).<sup>100</sup>

Murray’s own rationalisation of the Synod’s decision seems to be caught in the middle of the tension between subscribing blindly to the Catechism and faithfully passing on the tradition. He argues that the Synod’s faithfulness to dogma had implications for the salvation of the Church. Because so many souls depended on the Synod to safeguard the teaching of the Church, he rejoiced in the decision taken with regard to Kotzé (DO, 1864a: 44). Still, he did so with trepidation, he stated, as he realises that his own adherence to the faith is but a matter of grace, and that he too can stray (44). Nevertheless, if the Synod had not taken the decision, he argues, “dan ware zij ontrouw geweest en had de eeuwige belangen van ongeboren geslachten opgeofferd”<sup>101</sup> (44). Therefore, even though the Synod acted with her head bowed, and with fear, Murray states, he is grateful to God for the great mercy He had bestowed on his Church enabling her to remain true to her calling (44). Of course, he would have been thankful to God “indien de talenten van dien broeder voor de kerk bewaard waren gebleven”<sup>102</sup> (44), but he justifies himself based on the fact that the synod not only had Kotzé to think about, but also the tens of thousands of congregants spread all over the country (44). If the synod had acted differently, it would have been unfaithful to “de dure verpligting haar opgelegd, om het geloof den heiligen overgeleverd te bewaren”<sup>103</sup> (44). Protecting the Catechism in this specific way can therefore be said to have been directly related to what it means to be a true Protestant for Murray.

A similar argument can be found in *Die Kerkbode* of December 1863. It spells out the consequences of allowing the Catechism to be critiqued. The argument is made on behalf of all “who loves God’s Word” (P.H., 1863: 399) from the explicit presumption that there is a direct link between defending the Catechism and defending the Bible (399). The collapse of the Christian tradition is portrayed as happening in a domino-like fashion once criticism of the Catechism is allowed:

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<sup>99</sup> ... that no heresy was committed, and that it is also not alleged that such heresy was committed, but that the question was whether the door for heresy would be opened. It was not the question whether the poisonous plant itself was introduced; but whether they would allow the seed of the poisonous plant to be spread widely? Would they wait until they, who have been provided with the patient/enduring freedom, the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture, the justification through faith, openly denied and contested the total depravation/decay of the sinner? And this would be the result if they allowed a reverend in the church who stands on his right to say: ‘The Catechism is wrong’.

<sup>100</sup> This is again quoted in DO 1871: 17-18

<sup>101</sup> “then they were unfaithful and sacrificed the interests of unborn generations eternally”

<sup>102</sup> “if the talents of such a brother were preserved for the church”

<sup>103</sup> “the important obligation upon her to preserve the faith handed down by the saints”

Eerst begin men de lieden argwaan in te boezemen tegen Catechismus en Geloofsbelijdenis en beroept zich dan, met schijnbaar groote gehechtheid op Gods Woord, als op het eenig gezag waaraan men zich heeft te onderwerpen. Heeft men het eerst zoo ver gebragt, dat men de leerstellingen, uit Gods Woord geput en op Gods Woord gegrond, als menschenwerk heeft ter zijde gesteld, dan gaan men verder en begint men aan te toonen hoe ook de Bijbel een werk van menschen is. Daartoe vangt men aan met onnaauwkeurigheden, tegenstrijdigheden, verkeerdheden, onmogentlijkheden uit denzelfden aan te toonen. ‘Doch dit alles,’ zeggen zij, ‘behoeft nog niemand te schokken. De Bijbel is niet Gods Woord. Gods Woord is in den Bijbel ... Het duurt niet lang of men heeft eenen Christus, die door de profeten niet is voorspeld, die niet uit eene maagd geboren, die geene wonderen heeft verrigt, die ook niet uit het graf is opgestaan, en ook niet ten hemel is opgevaren, waar hij niet ter regterhand Gods gezeten, niet voor ons bidt, en vanwaar Hij ook niet wederkomen zal om te oordeelen de levenden en de dooden ... En zoo voort, zoo voort, tot dat men geene andere godsdienst overhoudt dan die van den Unitarier,... een geloof aan een groot en magtig Opperwezen, tot wien men het gebed kan opzenden: O God, als er een God is, heb medelijden met mijne ziel, indien ik eene ziel heb!’<sup>104</sup> (399-400).

In this conflict, two meanings of tradition in relation to the Catechism transpire. On the one hand, the Catechism is seen as an important element of Protestantism. On the other hand, however, there is a concern for how this tradition ought to be faithfully and successfully handed down. The orthodox spokesmen then seems to argue that the steps taken by the synod are necessary, even if somewhat undesirable, for the successful transmission of the tradition. *How* the Catechism ought to be *applied* becomes as important and self-evident as the Catechism itself. In the language of an earlier metaphor: the emphasis is not only on “het goede pand” but also on what “bewaar” means. For Murray, one may argue, “bewaar” implies avoiding dissension at all cost. The same can be said of Robertson. In response to Versfeld’s complaint discussed earlier, Robertson stated “dat het ten allen tijde uiterst bedenkelijk is maatregelen te nemen die leiden

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<sup>104</sup> First they start to inspire suspicion in the people against the Catechism and Confession and then invoke, with seeming great devotion, God’s Word, as only authority to which they have to submit. Had they first brought it so far, that they set aside the teachings, drawn from God’s Word and based on God’s Word, as the work of man, then they would go further and start to show how the Bible is also a work of man. To this end, they would start revealing inaccuracies, contradictions, mistakes, impossibilities. ‘Still, all of this,’ they say, ‘does not have to shock anyone.’ The Bible is not God’s Word. God’s Word is in the Bible ... It is not long before one has a Christ, which was not prophesied, not born of a virgin, who has not performed miracles, who also did not rise from the grave, and also not ascended into heaven, where he is not seated at the right hand of God, not to whom we pray, and from where He will not come to judge the living and the dead ... And so forth, and forth, until they maintain no other religion aside from the Unitarian, ... one faith of a great and mighty Supreme Being, at whom they can direct their prayer: O God, if there is a God, have mercy on my soul, if I have a soul!

kunnen tot de verbreking der eenheid eener christelijke kerk”<sup>105</sup> (Versfeld 1864: 15). Within this logic, both Kotzé’s remark and an aloof treatment of it by the synod is seen as a disregard for the calling to “preserve.” Versfeld’s reaction to this does not show a disagreement with the importance of the unity of the church or the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism is an important element of it, but a conflicting understanding of what the preservation of the Protestant tradition entails:

Had de Synode zelve dit maar ernstig bedacht! Zij zou dan niet aan de leerare onzer kerk den eisch gesteld hebben om niet slechts de hoofdwaarheden van een onzer belijdenisschriften, maar ook elke bijzondere bewoording, waarin die waarhede uitgedrukt zijn, te verdediging. Zulk eene letterdienst is zoo zeer in strijd met de grondbeginselen van het protestantisme, dat onze leeraar ontrouw zou geweest zijn aan zijnen pligt, zoo hij niet op het krachtigst de onredelijkheid van den gestelden eisch had aangetoond<sup>106</sup> (Versfeld 1864: 15).<sup>107</sup>

It is interesting to see the extent to which the DRC was prepared to implement the understanding of preservation propagated by Murray and Robertson. As a way to deal with its inability to act against ministers who were supposedly liberal, some congregations (Hanover in 1866 and Aliwal North in 1871) proceeded to establish parallel congregations known as “vrije gemeentes”<sup>108</sup> (Van der Watt, 1980: 37). According to Van der Watt, the Synod did not disapprove of this, and these congregations were served by DRC ministers. In 1876, the Synod even went so far as to recommend a split to the congregation of Victoria West who was dissatisfied with their minister, Rev. H.C.V. Leibbrandt (37). Leibbrandt, however, for the sake of unity, decided to resign (37).<sup>109</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism’s connotation of the unity of the church in this debate is

<sup>105</sup> “that it is at all times highly questionable to take measures that would lead to the destruction of the unity of one Christian church”

<sup>106</sup> Had the Synod only considered it seriously! They would then not have demanded the reverends of our church to not only defend the central truths of our confessions, but also each unique phrasing, in which these truths are expressed. Such a letter-by-letter approach is so very contrary to the principle of the Protestantism, to which our reverend would have been unfaithful in his duty, if he did not in the strongest way show the unreasonableness of the outlined requirement.

<sup>107</sup> See also DO 1864b: 58: “Zij spreekt derhalve in éénen adem zijn onschuld en vonnis uit. De Moderator zeide ook dat indien de Synode met betrekking tot den Predikant van Darling dien stap niet had genomen, zij dan ontrouw zou zijn geworden aan de dure verplichting haar opgelegd, om het geloof den heiligen overgeleverd te bewaren.”

<sup>108</sup> “free congregations”

<sup>109</sup> This is an interesting precursor to a phenomenon discussed in chapter 4. In the 1930s, congregants or ministers who did not agree with the DRC were advised to leave the church, because it was regarded as an organisation with which people “freely” associated (4.2.).

therefore not unambiguous. Apart from the DRC's apparent ambivalence regarding the unity of the church concluded from the examples above, the liberals saw the way in which the Catechism was applied as being harmful to the unity of the church. These different approaches seem to be drawn from different ideas about the earliest Reformed communities. The orthodox concept of unity appears to be mostly anchored in a nostalgic and romanticised idea of harmony and absence of conflict based on the belief that there was such a glorious moment in the Protestant past that now stands to be lost. Interestingly, in order to achieve that conflict-free community, congregants were time and again called to arms (see 3.2.2., 4.4.2. and 4.4.3.). Albeit in a metaphorical and spiritual sense, the language in "armed struggle" is strikingly pervasive. The liberals, on the contrary, more openly grounded their understanding of unity (or at least the idea that orthodox unity was flawed) on the idea that Protestantism was born from a context where conflict was rife and prominent.

#### *2.2.4. Orthodoxy, heterodoxy and the civil court*

Unsatisfied with the Synod's decision to expel him, J.J. Kotzé turned to the civil court. Andrew Murray himself defended the DRC's case in the court, whereas Kotzé was assisted by legal professionals. On 2 September 1864, the court ruled that the DRC's suspension of Kotzé was unjust. On 26 Mei 1865, the same was decided regarding the case of T.F. Burgers – another supposedly liberal minister expelled from the DRC. The DRC appealed to the Privy Council in London, but also lost this case in 1867 (Van der Watt, 1980: 37). The DRC was not satisfied with this outcome, and holding on to the belief that it was due to a mistake on the side of the Council, they decided to dismiss the Synod of 1867 rather than allow suspended liberal ministers to attend (38). The court's rulings were interpreted as a double setback for the church. Not only were ministers now free to preach liberal theology in the church, but the DRC was supposedly rendered powerless in the face of the civil court (or "worldly authority", as it was often referred to) to rule over its own matters.

As will become clear later in the chapter, even after Kotzé was acquitted by the civil court and the DRC's application of its church law found unjust, the DRC claimed victory over liberalism. The firm stance of the synod against Kotzé and others, continued to be celebrated and it was this memory of the Liberal Struggle that was eventually consecrated and taken up in official historiography. In the prevailing memory of the event, there was no question that the door had successfully been shut.

Although the DRC did not succeed in expelling so-called representatives of liberalism from

its ranks, a rapid decline in liberal vigour was said to have occurred from 1870, and by 1880 the onslaught is believed to have been successfully warded off (Van der Watt, 1980: 38). The Stellenbosch Seminary is said to have played an important role in this, together with Professors John Murray and N.J. Hofmeyr.

## 2.3. Remembering defeat: making sense of the court's ruling

The outcome of the civil court case brought about a new context and need for reorientation for both the “orthodox” and “liberal” sides. This section looks at two specific examples of sense-making from representatives of the “orthodox” side. Two texts are followed closely in order to present an in-depth account of the reorientation and what it implied for the development of the DRC's identity.

### 2.3.1. “*Evangeliedienaar*”

The first orthodox example is a long letter from someone writing under the pseudonym “Evangeliedienaar”<sup>110</sup> published in two consecutive editions of *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (1864a: 313-315; 1864b 329-333). It is addressed to the members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Despite, or perhaps because of, the court's ruling that Kotzé had been unjustly dismissed, Evangeliedienaar portrays the DRC as the vulnerable and mistreated party. She is the one suffering humiliation,<sup>111</sup> he states, and, moreover, she finds herself entrapped by these developments. This entrapment is expressed through the metaphor of a closed door – this time as something that is to the detriment of the DRC. However, it is sketched so as to underscore the DRC's absolute dependency on God:

Van elke zijde scheen de deur dus gesloten te wezen... En menig een vond zich eindelijk, gelijk Israel aan de Roode Zee van ouds, bezet van achteren en van voren, ingesloten ter regter- en ter linkerzijde. Met gevaar van rondom aan alle zijden, bleef er slechts één weg open voor de benaauwde ziel: de weg naar Boven<sup>112</sup> (1864a: 315).

The letter interprets the court's ruling as a serious blow to the DRC in two regards: first,

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<sup>110</sup> “Servant of the Gospel”

<sup>111</sup> “...de verlegenheid werd bij het nadenken over de zaak waarlijk niet minder” (Evangeliedienaar, 1864a: 315).

<sup>112</sup> The door therefore seems to be closed from both sides ... And many finally found themselves, like Israel at the Red Sea of old, trapped from behind and in front, enclosed from the right- and the left side. With danger from all around on all sides, only one path remains open to the distressed soul: the path to Above.

with regard to the firm stand it took on signs of “liberalism”, and, second, with regard to the status of its (legal) autonomy (1864a: 313). Evangeliedienaar frames it as follows: “de leer der Gereformeerde Kerk”<sup>113</sup> (1864b: 331) and “de geestelijke onafhankelijkheid der kerk”<sup>114</sup> (330) have come under attack with the court’s ruling.

Because of this, the church finds herself in extraordinary circumstances (313), and this is also what motivates Evangeliedienaar to write his letter. The specific interpretation of the events that he provides is depicted as universal and for him it is clear that everybody realises the gravity of the moment: “[h]et is niet noodig u te herinneren of te verklaren, welke die buitengewone omstandigheden zijn”<sup>115</sup> (313). Nevertheless, he continues to describe these events in dramatic terms:

De belangstelling, waarmede wij hoorden van het dienen der klagte van den predikant van Darling tegen de Synode was te levendig; het gewigt van de belangen waaromtrent er gestreden moest worden werd te diep gevoeld; de verzuchtingen en gebeden, waarmede de Troon des Hemels werd aangeloopen, waren te veel en te vurig; en de verslagenheid, waarmede het volk Gods de tijding vernam, dat door de uitspraak der regters het vonnis der Synode verklaard was te zijn, nul en van geene waarde, is nog te versch in aller geheugen en ondervinding, dan dat het noodig zoude wezen, om de aanleiding tot mijn schrijven te verklaren of te regtvaardigen (313).

For Evangeliedienaar, the court’s ruling has a singular implication for the whole of the church. The singularity of meaning of the events serves to unify the church, and the suffering it brought about for the church motivates:

Allen hebben te zeer zamengedeeld in éénen strijd, ééne hoop en bede, en ééne belangstelling, dan dat er geene behoefte zoude zijn, ons met elkander over deze zaak te onderhouden, en elkander te wijzen op den grond, die er overblijft tot hoop en moed, tot nieuwen en heiligen strijd<sup>116</sup> (313).

The church is in a struggle and it is everyone’s struggle. However, the fact that the whole church suffers together, is also the source of their hope and courage for the new and holy struggle (313). The suffering already holds a promise: the struggle will unify the church and strengthen the faith of her members even further:

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<sup>113</sup> “the doctrine of the Reformed Church”

<sup>114</sup> “the spiritual independence of the church”

<sup>115</sup> “it is not necessary to remind you or to explain what the extraordinary circumstances are”

<sup>116</sup> Everyone has shared too greatly in one struggle, one hope and prayer, and one interest, that there is any need for us to entertain each other with this matter, and to point out to each other the reasons that remain for hope and courage, for a new and divine struggle.

De strijd wekt al den ernst van het geloofsleven op, en oefent zijne krachten. De strijd dient om de kerk te vereenigen, en den band van geloovigen aan elkander naauwer toe te halen. De strijd leidt tot een dieper onderzoek van Gods Woord omtrent het wezen der kerk, tot een veel levendiger besef van hare geestelijke roeping en kracht. De strijd geeft gelegenheid voor de openbaring van den Vorst van het heer des Heeren in ons midden en van zijne wonderdaden. De strijd geeft zegen, en brengt eene heerlijke overwinning. Dat niemand zich dan onttrekke. Een ieder wete en versta waarvoor er gestreden wordt. Een ieder kieze onder wien hij strijden wil. Een ieder doe eene besliste keuze, en eene openhartige belijdenis. Dat de gansche gemeente zich schare onder de banier van haren koning, dat zij biddenden ernst den strijd afwachte<sup>117</sup> (332).

Even though “Evangeliedienaar” announces that a struggle that involves the entire church is at hand, he argues that the DRC does not have to defend itself in the eyes of the world. In fact, there seems to be nothing to fear:

Neen, wij weten hoeveel duizendmaal die leer op nieuw aan Gods Woord is getoetst geworden. Wij weten wat ons eigen onderzoek en Gods Geest ons daaromtrent geleerd hebben; en wij willen ons tegen de vijanden niet aan de dwaasheid schuldig maken om te gaan bewijzen wat zij niet verstaan kunnen, wat zij niet gelooven willen. Laten wij niet vreezen om voor de Regters, of wie het zijn moge, het regt der kerk te handhaven, dat hare leer beschouwd zal worden als regel en maatstaf waarnaar een ieder geoordeeld moet worden<sup>118</sup> (332).

It is a struggle depicted in language of identity, heritage and tradition, and also autonomy. But it directly states that these things need not be proved, explained or defended: they have been *inherited* and they are therefore a *given*. Evangeliedienaar’s own *position/interpretation* is sketched as directly given by (his *explanation* of) the events and

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<sup>117</sup> The struggle awakens all the seriousness of the faith, and exercises its powers. The struggle serves to unite the church, and then binds believers closer together. The struggle leads to a deeper investigation of God’s Word regarding the essence of the church, to a much more vivid sense of her spiritual calling and power. The struggle provides the occasion for the revelation of the Majesty of the power of the Lord in our midst and of his miracles. The struggle gives blessings, and brings a glorious victory. Let no one then withdraw. Everyone knows and understands what is being fought for. Everyone chooses for whom he will fight. Everyone makes a definite choice, and an unreserved confession. That the whole congregation comes together under the banner of her king, that she waits in anticipation of the struggle in earnest prayer.

<sup>118</sup> No, we know how many thousand times the teaching has been tested anew against God’s Word. We know what our own investigation and God’s Spirit taught us about it; and we do not want to make ourselves guilty against our enemies of the folly to go and prove what they cannot understand, what they do not want to believe. Let us not be afraid to uphold the justice of the church in front of judges, or whoever it may be, that her teaching will be considered the rule and measure against which everyone should be judged.



perfectly in line with the Christian truth.

Although the “struggle against liberalism” was broader than the struggle against Kotzé and his statements about the Heidelberg Catechism, the fact that the court case was centred on this very issue, once again renews the focus on it. Being faithful to the Catechism in the way that the DRC was, became associated for Evangeliedienaar with the unity of the church, the essence of the church, the spiritual calling and power of the church, the revelation of the power of God through miracles, and being faithful to God. Hence, the outcry: “‘Israel is geslagen voor het aangezicht zijner vijanden! En de arke Gods is genomen!’”<sup>119</sup> (314). Given these associations, the dismay of so many members of the church is understandable when the court nullified its upholding of the Catechism in the Kotzé case.

The court’s ruling was also interpreted as robbing the church of the freedom that it has come to enjoy under British rule<sup>120</sup> (specifically that granted by Ordinance no. 7 of 1843).<sup>121</sup> For Evangeliedienaar, the DRC’s right to make its own theological decisions has been impinged on. The struggle facing the church was therefore also about its “spiritual independence” (330) and its now “imperilled freedom” (314). What was at stake was the church’s ability and right to uphold “the honour of the Church and her King” (314). Evangeliedienaar frames this as a question about who the ruler of the church is, and who she ultimately obeys and serves:

Jezus Christus is de eenige Heer en Koning Zijner Gemeente. Aan Zijne dienaren heeft Hij den sleutel des Koninkrijks toevertrouwd. Die magt der sleutelen moet zij tot den doode toe bewaren als haar heilig erfregt, haar van haren Koning geschonken ... De staat mag niet zeggen, aan wien de Sacramenten bediend zullen worden. De staat mag niet zeggen, wie regt heeft die bediening te bekleeden. Wil de staat dit zeggen, dan mag de kerk hem niet gehoorzamen. De keizer vergrijpt zich aan hetgeen Godes is; de wereld wil heerschappij voeren over het Koninkrijk van Gods gezalfden. Dit mag niet wezen<sup>122</sup> (330).

<sup>119</sup> “‘Israel has been beaten in the face of its enemies! And God’s ark was taken!’”

<sup>120</sup> “Men had zich altijd zoo veilig gevoeld, in de onbeperkte gewetensvrijheid, die in Engeland de wet des lands is” (Evangeliedienaar 1864a: 313). And later: “Men wist dat die vrijheid van de kerk voor haar eigen inwendig bestuur gesanctioneerd en verzekerd was door eene Ordonnantie ...” (313).

<sup>121</sup> In 1843, this ordinance replaced the Church Order of De Mist and granted the church freedom from control by the government. Political commissioners, for example, no longer had a seat in church meetings. The church was also given the power to regulate its own internal affairs.

<sup>122</sup> Jesus Christ is the only Lord and King of His Congregation. To his servants, he entrusted the key to His Kingdom. The power of the key they should protect to death as their divine inheritance, given to them by their King ... The state may not say to whom the sacraments will be served. The state may not say who has the right to serve as minister. If the state wants to say this, the church may not obey it. The emperor takes



In the face of this danger of heavenly and earthly authority being confused, the readers are summoned to pray for heavenly wisdom because “[d]e vrijheid van de kerk en hare leer van de magt der wereld staat ten naauwste verbonden met het welzijn der gemeente voor toekomstige geslachten ...”<sup>123</sup> (332):

Bidt, broeders! Dat allen die in deze zaak te handelen hebben, door eene hemelsche wijsheid geleid worden. Dat zij gereed mogen zijn alles toe te geven, en zich in alles te onderwerpen, dat slechts eenigzins bestaanbaar is met de eere van God en de vrijheid van het geweten<sup>124</sup> (332).

In his interpretation of the legal battle between Kotzé and the DRC, Evangeliedienaar reaches two conclusions. The first is that Kotzé’s acquittal signifies that neither Kotzé and any of his supporters, nor the court and anyone who approves of its ruling have any understanding of or respect for the “nature and principles” of the church (314). This is how he justifies the DRC’s position despite the court’s ruling. Evangeliedienaar argues that all of history shows that in presbyterian churches (referring to church law) “men zich het regt heeft voorbehouden, van eene summiere bestraffing bij een vergrijp tegen het gezag der kerk”<sup>125</sup> (314). But because the court lacks the ability to understand the laws and principles of the church, she is placed in the unfortunate position to prove once again that an act like Kotzé’s – “eene belastering van den Katechismus, eene verbreking van den eed van getrouwheid, eene geweldadige toeëigening eener bandeloze leervrijheid”<sup>126</sup> (314) – is indeed “a crime” (314). The court’s inability to comprehend the church subjects her to judgment according to “worldly principles,” and consequently “werd zij in een bespottelijke daglicht voorgesteld”<sup>127</sup> (314). For Evangeliedienaar, the court’s ruling does nothing but abate the gravity of Kotzé’s crime. Therefore, he not only reminds his readers of the place of the Catechism in the Reformed tradition, but also of the traditional way of dealing with those who dare to breach it.

The second conclusion reached by Evangeliedienaar concerns God’s role in the events that have unfolded. How is the DRC to understand the fact that God permitted the church to be humiliated in the way described, and what does it imply? Evangeliedienaar reckons

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of that which belongs to God; the world wants to rule over the Kingdom of God’s anointed. This may not be.

<sup>123</sup> “the freedom of the church and her doctrine of the power of the world is most closely associated with the wellbeing of the congregation of future generations”

<sup>124</sup> Pray, brothers! That all who have to act in this case/matter, will be led by a heavenly wisdom. That they will be prepared to concede everything, and to submit themselves in everything, that is only somewhat congruent with the honour of God and the freedom of conscience.

<sup>125</sup> “it has reserved the right of an immediate punishment for an offense against the authority of the church”

<sup>126</sup> “a defamation of the Catechism, a breach of the oath of allegiance, a violent appropriation of a lawless freedom of learning”

<sup>127</sup> “she was presented in a ridiculous light”

that God wanted to teach the DRC a much-needed lesson:

En toen was het aanvankelijk oogmerkt bereikt, dat de Heer met de beproeving had bedoeld. Hij wilde zijn volk in den nood uitdrijven, om zich aan Hem en Zijne hulp vast te klemmen. Het is voor ons van het uiterste belang om dit denkbeeld duidelijk te vatten en vast te houden<sup>128</sup> (315).

The comfort and prosperity (“zegen en voorspoed”) (329) that the DRC had come to enjoy given, firstly, the legal freedom granted by the Ordinance of 1843, and secondly, its successes over the past few years,<sup>129</sup> are stated as reasons for God’s intervention. It is argued that too much comfort and prosperity exposes the church to “vleeschelijke zelfverheffing”<sup>130</sup> (329) and that there was a danger that her members would come to rely on and trust in their own (outer) strength:

... het was te vreezen, dat dat woord van Israel ook van ons konde waarheid worden: ‘Als nu Jeschurun vet werd, zoo sloeg hij achteruit; en hij liet God varen,’ of dat andere: ‘Ik sprak u aan in uwen grooten voorspoed, maar gij zeidet: ik zal niet hooren.’<sup>131</sup> (329)

Another significant reason given for God’s rebuke is the so-called “novel idea” that the world is changing – an idea “die zoo ongemerk en toch zoo algemeen ingang vindt”<sup>132</sup> (329). For Evangeliedienaar, this is a dangerous idea as it forms the basis for the belief that the enmity between the world and the church no longer exists as it did in the time of Christ. But it is from this very idea, the argument goes, that the faithful God is protecting his church by bringing misery over her:

... en door haar in den nood te brengen het zichtbare voor haar te verdonkeren, leidt Hij haar uit om Hem als haar Koning en haar heil te erkennen. In de smart en de verlegenheid der beproeving leert zij zijn regt als koning erkennen, en zich naar de schikking van zijn wil voegen, om daarin te berusten. Zij leert zich van het zichtbare verheffen tot den onzienlijken God en aan Hem vast te houden. Zij wordt herinnerd dat hier beneden haar deel en haar heil niet te

<sup>128</sup> And then the initial objective was reached, which the Lord intended with the test. He wanted to cast his people out in distress to hold on to Him and his help. It is of the utmost importance for us to grasp this idea clearly and hold on to it.

<sup>129</sup> As examples of such successes, Evangeliedienaar mentions the number of new congregations that were established, the fact that more ministers arrived from Europe, the new seminary in Stellebosch, “zendingarbeid”/“missionary work”, conferences, book publications and its spreading (Evangeliedienaar 1864b: 329).

<sup>130</sup> “bodily exaltation”

<sup>131</sup> ... it was feared that the story of Israel could also become true for us: ‘But when Jushurun grew fat, and so he deteriorated; and he forsook God,’ or else: “I spoke to you in your great prosperity, but you said: I will not listen.

<sup>132</sup> “the idea which is so unnoticeable but which appeals so widely”

vinden is, dat zij aan hare onzichtbare en toekomstige heerlijkheid genoeg heeft om alle gemis te vergoeden. Hare betrekking tot de wereld wordt haar duidelijk gemaakt; zij mag zich niet laten verleiden tot de verbeelding dat de vijandschap reeds is te niet gedaan, dat de overwinning reeds is behaald. Neen!<sup>133</sup> (329).

The “suffering and humiliation” the church is experiencing, argues Evangeliedienaar, is therefore to be understood as continuous with that of her Lord: the church was wrongfully sentenced just as Jesus was, and by sharing in this tribulation, she is getting to know her Lord better (329). Through its suffering, the church also learns to take delight in humiliation “om Jezus wille”<sup>134</sup>:

... het is haar goed en zoet met Hem onder het kruis te zijn. Zij leert opmerken, dat gelijk voor Hem, zoo ook voor haar het lijden de weg is tot het voorteeken van overwinning en heerlijkheid. Zij leert zich in de beproeving verblijden, als van God geschikt, en als bevrucht met de rijkste zegeningen. Het wordt haar een teken, dat haar God aan haar denkt, en haar voorbereiden wil om minder aardsch en vleeschelijk, meer geestelijk en aan Christus gelijk te worden<sup>135</sup> (329).

In this light, the author writes, the recent events must be understood as a “blessed tribulation” and an “envoy of God’s love” (329). The conflict in which the church finds herself – firstly, with regard to dogmatic affairs and theological differences and, secondly, through the court, with how she had chosen to deal with those affairs – is interpreted as a (double) affirmation of her own position. It is an onslaught from the world which the church needs to resist, but also a trial through which God is putting the DRC. By maintaining the firm stand initially taken against those who questioned and attacked the Catechism, the church is therefore gaining twofold clout in Evangeliedienaar’s interpretation.

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<sup>133</sup> ... and by bringing her into trouble to darken that which is in front of her, He leads her to recognise Him as her King and to recognise her salvation. In the suffering and the humiliation of trial, she learns the right to recognise her king, and adjust to be in agreement with his will, to resign herself to it. She learns about the visible exaltation of the unseen God and to hold on to Him. She is reminded that without this, her role and her salvation are not to be found, that she has enough in the unseen and future glory to compensate all loss. Her relationship to the world is clarified; she may not let herself be tempted to believe that the enmity has been eradicated, that the victory has already been achieved. No!

<sup>134</sup> “for Jesus’ sake”

<sup>135</sup> ... it is well and good for her to be with Him at the foot of the cross. She learns to notice, that just like Him, suffering is the path in front of her as the sign of victory and glory. She learns to gladden herself in the trial, if from God, and bestowed with the richest blessings. It becomes a sign for her that her God thinks of her, and wants to prepare her to be less materialistic and of the flesh, but to be more spiritual and to become like Christ.

For Evangeliedienaar, the conflict itself is the very reason not to address conflict in any other way than holding fast to the certainty that the church claimed for itself. From this position, the members of the DRC are called to enter the struggle, which is said to have only started, with force:

Heeft de Kerk alzo het gevaar dat haar dreigt leeren verstaan, maar tevens dat het de Heer is die haar in dezen nood heeft ingevoerd, en hoedanig Hij dan hebben wil dat zij onder denzelven voor Hem verkeereren moet, dan is zij bereid om, met stille gehoorzaamheid aan Gods leiding toe te vertrouwen, zich met kracht aan te gorden tot den grooten strijd die er is aangebroken ... De strijd moge lang en moeilijk zijn, de offers die geëischt worden veel en groot, onze Koning is het waard, en met hem weten wij ons meer dan overwinnaars<sup>136</sup> (330-331).

Evangeliedienaar is concerned that some congregants may reason that the struggle has nothing to do with their own salvation and that it is even pious not to get caught up in ecclesial disputes (332). But he makes it his task to affirm that this is a big delusion: “De eer van zijnen koning gaat elke onderdaan aan”<sup>137</sup> (332).

To summarise: Evangeliedienaar presents a cosmic interpretation of this conflict centred on the Heidelberg Catechism. His letter depicts the church as being besieged – she is under attack and only God can save her. It is important for Evangeliedienaar that people understand what the situation is about. The “battle” the church finds herself in is sketched as a cosmic and holy war – it is the church against the world; a battle between earthly and heavenly rulers. The DRC is tested to see who she is going to obey. It is also portrayed, not as a new battle, but as an old and a known one. The specific things on which the conflict centres – identity and tradition – are seen as a given and not something that needs to be defended. Therefore, the outcome of the conflict is certain – the church will conquer. (Comparisons are made with Israel’s and Jesus’ own suffering). The only thing that is required is trust in God. In fact, this is also what the *meaning* of the suffering is: it is a trial through which the church must go in order to strengthen her faith and trust in God. Other good things will come from it too: it will bring about unity, and God will reveal himself to the church in new ways. The *strangeness* of the church in the eyes of the world is also positively affirmed. It is highlighted that the church’s nature and principles are not

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<sup>136</sup> If the Church thus understands what threatens her, but also that it was the Lord who brought her into this suffering, and how much He wants her to come before Him of her own accord, then she is willing to, in quiet obedience to trust in God’s guidance, binding herself strongly to the greater struggle that has started ...The struggle may be long and tough, the sacrifices many and big, our King is worth it, and with Him we are more than conquerors.

<sup>137</sup> “The honour of their king is every subject’s business.”

easily grasped by the world.

### 2.3.2. N.J. Hofmeyr as “WACHTER”

Another example of reorientation came from the pen of Prof. N.J. Hofmeyr. Although he initially published his writing about Kotzé’s court case as a series of articles under the pseudonym “WACHTER” in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* and *Volksvriend*, it was later reworked and published as *De Kerk en de Rechtbank* (1865). Here I will refer only to the first of his writings in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (1864: 289-309).

What is significant about Hofmeyr’s writing is how the civil court’s acquittal of someone who criticised the Catechism changes the meaning of what was at stake in the Liberal Struggle. Much of Hofmeyr’s argumentation is an evaluation of the court case, and his conclusion is that the judges’ understanding of the relationship between church and state is Erastian, and therefore invalid. The aim here is not to reassess or interpret the validity of either Hofmeyr’s argument or the court’s ruling, but to focus on Hofmeyr’s (mnemonic) strategies to make sense of the DRC’s position given his interpretation of the situation.

For Wachter, as for Evangeliedienaar, the court’s ruling brought about a “hachelijken toestand”<sup>138</sup> (289) for the church, and it happened “most unexpectedly” (289). But he manages to reposition the matter even more decidedly than Evangeliedienaar by concealing the initial conflict between Kotzé and the church with the conception of a new, *real* threat:

Wij dachten nog, dat enkele ligte troepen voor ons voortvluchtende waren, toen wij op eenmaal tot staan werden gebracht door een schijnbaar onoverwinnelijk bolwerk. Wij meenden met de liberale predikanten en hun aanhang in den Kerk te doen te hebben, toen wij als uit een droom wakker schrikten om te hooren, dat wij niet langer in de eerste plaats met hen, maar met het Hooge Gerechtshof te strijden hebben<sup>139</sup> (304).

Wachter’s dilemma is not with the fact that the church had to defend itself in court or with the court’s power itself. He makes it clear that he does honour the civil court as a power appointed by God (289). For him, the dilemma is that the court, according to him, abused its power. His writing is consequently based on the fact that he may not and

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<sup>138</sup> “desperate state”

<sup>139</sup> We still thought that some light troops were fleeing in front of us when we were once halted by a seemingly invincible stronghold. We argued with liberal ministers and their supporters we met in the Church when we startled awake as if from a dream that we are not struggling with them, in the first place, but with the High Court.

cannot be silent about it:

...maar te zwijgen waar ik de heiligste beginselen miskend, en de dierbaarste belangen op het wankle spel gebragt zie, dit mag, dit kan ik niet<sup>140</sup> (289).

He acts, not from a position of audacity forcing his opinion upon dissenters, or conceitedly prescribing to the leaders of the church the path they have to take, but from his duty towards members of the Reformed Church<sup>141</sup> (289). For him, it is a calling to which he must be obedient: “Ik wil den Keizer geven wat des Keizers, maar ook Gode wat Godes is”<sup>142</sup> (289).

Wachter gives a long exposition of the issue of the Dutch church and church order before the Synod of Dordt (292-295) to indicate that for him too, the events of 1618-1619 served as a prominent framework of understanding in his attempt to make sense of the South African events of the 1860s.

Key to his understanding of the affair is that the court had abused its (only) power, that of “des swaards”<sup>143</sup>,<sup>144</sup> and trampled the power that only belongs to the church, “der sleutelen”<sup>145</sup> (291)<sup>146</sup>. By doing this, the court “robbed” the synod of the power that the state itself had given her by the Ordinance of 1843 and to which Kotzé, as a member of the DRC, had freely submitted himself: “in een woord, dan neemt zij de magt der sleutelen in hare handen”<sup>147</sup> (291). By this abuse of power, the court not only claimed the right to enquire about the “geestelijke gronden eener kerkelijke regtspleging”<sup>148</sup> but also to destroy it (305). By reinstating Kotzé in his churchly office, the court took the church’s key in its own hands, and “bound again what the church, in the name of her head and Lord Jesus Christ, had disbanded” (305).

In Wachter’s view, the church had lost its independence through the Kotzé case. Even if the court did it unintentionally, he argues, it adopted a principle that cannot but lead to

<sup>140</sup> ... but to remain quiet where I see the most sacred principles disregarded, and the dearest concerns brought to an unsteady play, that I may not, I cannot do.

<sup>141</sup> “...maar ik acht het een pligt aan mijne broeders, de leden der Gereformeerde Kerk verschuldigd, naar het licht dat in mij is” (WACHTER 1864: 289).

<sup>142</sup> “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God”

<sup>143</sup> “of the sword”

<sup>144</sup> Based on Calvin’s understanding of the church, and Art 36 of the Belgic Confession (WACHTER 1864: 290).

<sup>145</sup> “of the key”

<sup>146</sup> Based on Sunday 31 of the Catechism (WACHTER 1864: 290).

<sup>147</sup> “in a word, then she takes the power of the key into her hands”

<sup>148</sup> “the spiritual/religious grounds of an ecclesial fostering of justice”

“vreeselijke gevolgen”<sup>149</sup> (292). This happened because the court took upon itself the power to decide “wat al dan niet met de leer van den Katechismus overeen komt”<sup>150</sup> (295). By doing so, everything the church does will become clouded in trembling uncertainty:

Wij vragen eerbiedig maar nadrukkelijk: waartoe eene Synode, als hare uitlegging van hare eigene wetten niet beslissend is; als zij in revisie kan worden genomen door het Hooge Gerechtshof? Wordt niet hierdoor de magt, door de Ordonnantie haar toegestaan, feitelijk opgeheven; en al wat zij doet in wankele onzekerheid gebragt?<sup>151</sup> (298).

Opposed to this uncertainty, is the certainty of Kotzé’s crime. One argument of the court rested on the fact that the synod did not issue Kotzé with an official “akte van beskuldiging”<sup>152</sup>. Wachter agrees that it is a fundamental principle of the law that the defendant should be clear about the charges laid against him or her (299), but he finds it absolutely implausible that Kotzé could not have known what he did wrong.

Heeft ooit een mensch op aarde geweten wat de misdaad was, waarom hij gestraft is, dan was het gewis Ds. Kotzé! Heeft hij ooit in de verste verte te kennen gegeven dat hij het niet wist?<sup>153</sup> (299).

Wachter argues that the court was unable to understand the *real meaning* of Kotzé’s “uitval tegen de Katechismus”<sup>154</sup> (300). It should have accepted Andrew Murray’s – who acted as lawyer for the DRC – point that

het godsdienstig, gevoel der Synode zóó diep gekrenkt, en naar haar oordeel een zoo heilig beginsel met vuige voeten vertreden was, dat zij niet anders handelen kon, dan onmiddellijke herroeping te eischen<sup>155</sup> (300).

For the court, it was an issue of “discussievrijheid”<sup>156</sup> but for the church one of “leervrijheid”<sup>157</sup>, and according to Wachter, Kotzé knew that (300). Kotzé “dared” to

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<sup>149</sup> “to terrible consequences”

<sup>150</sup> “what may or may not correspond with the doctrine of the Catechism”

<sup>151</sup> We ask respectfully, but with emphasis: whereto with a Synod, if her interpretation of her own laws is not binding; if her interpretation can be revised by a High Court? Is the power afforded her by the Ordinance not practically lifted; and everything she does brought into wavering uncertainty?

<sup>152</sup> “indictment”/“summons”

<sup>153</sup> If ever a man on earth knew what his crime was, why he was punished, it was certainly Rev. Kotzé! Did he ever, even remotely, indicate that he did not know?

<sup>154</sup> “outburst against the Catechism”

<sup>155</sup> the religious, the sense of the Synod so deeply offended, and in her opinion such a sacred principle trampled by filthy feet, that she could not act otherwise than to demand immediate revocation

<sup>156</sup> “freedom of discussion”

<sup>157</sup> “freedom of doctrine”



“attack” the Catechism “zelfs in den boezem der Synodale Vergadering, die tot haar hoofddoel de handhaving der Gereformeerde leer stelt”<sup>158</sup> (300), after he had freely submitted himself to it with his own signature<sup>159</sup> (300). The synod had “holier rights to uphold” and “higher duties to fulfil” than to grant her members “freedom of discussion” (301), he argues, and moreover such freedom can be dangerous:

Dit regt kan het ergste onrecht, deze vrijheid de ergste bandeloosheid worden, als de Synode zich nie van de pligten kwijt, die zij verschuldigd is aan het Hoofd der Kerk, in wiens naam zij dan vergadert, en aan de duizende leden der kerk, wier belangen zijn vertegenwoordigt<sup>160</sup> (301).

Wachter clearly views the DRC as having played an important role in conserving the Reformed/Christian truth in the way that it approached the Kotzé case. Furthermore, Wachter holds that “[a]llen, wien de leer der kerk dierbaar is, ook die tot andere kerkgenootschappen behooren”<sup>161</sup> were grateful to God for the role she played (301). But the court’s ruling “keert het alles om”<sup>162</sup> and “praises Rev. Kotzé as the one who fulfilled his duty” (301) and the DRC as the party who infringed someone’s rights in its “odium theologicum” (301). The DRC, according to Wachter, has taken the side of the “vrije conscientie bij duizenden”<sup>163</sup> that has been “willens en wetens vertrappen”<sup>164</sup> by the court when it sided with “het regt van vrije discussie bij een individu”<sup>165</sup> (301). Nevertheless, he expresses his conviction that the court sought justice for all parties, but was unable to do so because it followed the wrong principle, namely the Erastian principle (301).

Hun Erastiaansch regtsbeginsel dreef hen daartoe. En eenmaal daartoe gedreven, was het hun niet mogelijk te zien, wat de Synode zag; te voelen wat de Synode gevoelde; en moesten zij wat de Synode uit pligtsgevoel voor God en de gemeente, als misdaad meende te moeten straffen, in bescherming nemen, uit besef van pligt aan Hare Majesteit en eenen hare onderdanen verschuldigd ... Indien toch ooit de onhoudbaarheid van een beginsel uit zijne gevolgen is gebleken, dan is het ditmaal geschied. Het is alleen waar de regter

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<sup>158</sup> “even at the heart of the Synodal Assembly, which sets as its main objective maintaining the Reformed doctrine”

<sup>159</sup> Wachter even states the date of Kotzé’s subscription to the Heidelberg Catechism: September 1858.

<sup>160</sup> This privilege can be the worst injustice, that freedom the worst lawlessness, when the Synod is not rid of the duties, which she owes the Head of the Church, in whose name she assembles, and to the thousands of members of the church, whose interests she represents.

<sup>161</sup> “everyone, to whom the doctrine of the church is dear, also those belonging to other church denominations”

<sup>162</sup> “reverses everything”

<sup>163</sup> “clean/free conscience of thousands”

<sup>164</sup> “knowingly trampled”

<sup>165</sup> “with the right of the individual for free discussion”



door een Erastiaansch regtsbeginsel zich leiden laat dat hij zoo verre komen kan, dat hij meent geroepen te zijn de allerheiligst taak, waaraan de heiligste mannen Gods niet anders dan in den naam van Christus zich durven wagen, te aanvaarden<sup>166</sup> (302).

Wachter's concern is that, even if it was unintentional, the court's ruling, based on questionable principles, holds lethal implications: it awarded itself the ability and right to deal with the "teederste godsdienstige vraagstuk"<sup>167</sup> (302) and thereby tethered thousands of members of the Reformed church to its own insights. It allowed a Jewish, Roman Catholic and atheist judge respectively to decide about a question that had the entire Protestant church buzzing about something "waar men met nadruk alleen aan de hand des Heiligen Geestes het regte pad vinden kan"<sup>168</sup> (302).

Wachter further cautions that the judges' disposition, although they did not explicitly have to argue this, was based on the idea that Kotzé subscribed to the Catechism *insofar* as it agrees with God's Word, and not *because* it agrees (303). To subscribe on those terms is actually to subscribe to nothing, Wachter holds (303).

The DRC foresaw the "dreadful consequences" of such "bandeloosheid"<sup>169</sup> regarding the teaching of the church, and had already dealt with it in 1837 when it decided on its subscription formula (303). This is a sensitive issue in the church, and whoever touches it, touches her heart, Wachter states (303). Based on the state of her "mother church" (the Dutch church), Wachter writes, the Reformed church in South Africa regards "leervrijheid"<sup>170</sup> as the "moordtuig waarmede de mensch, voor zoo verre hij het vermag, haar om't leven brengt"<sup>171</sup> (303).

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<sup>166</sup> Their Erastian principle of law drove them to do so. And once driven to do so, it was not possible for them to see, what the Synod saw; to feel what the Synod felt; and they had to see a crime fit to punish, i.e. which the Synod before God and congregation had taken into protection, out of duty to her Majesty and out of responsibility to her subjects ... If ever the untenability of a principle has emerged from its results, then it occurred this time. It is only where the judge takes the Erastian principle of law that it gets this far, that he expects to be called to the holy task, which the most holy men of God cannot but accept through the name of Christ.

<sup>167</sup> "tenderest religious issue"

<sup>168</sup> "where one can only find the right path by focusing on and holding on to the hand of the Holy Spirit"

<sup>169</sup> "lawlessness"

<sup>170</sup> "freedom of doctrine"

<sup>171</sup> "deadly weapons which man uses, as far as possible, to execute her"

Dit zwaard schijnt, door het vonnis in het jongste regstgeding gevallen, haar boven het hoofd te zweven, en ziet er is een noodgeschrei uit de binnekamers van duizende biddende zielen opgegaan tot den Heer Zebaoth!<sup>172</sup> (303)

Despite the imminent danger, Wachter attests to the fact that “[t]he congregation of Christ” is immortal (303). Even if the court, with its power of the sword, tries to enforce its theological insight on the DRC – “zoo als de staten van Holland vóór de Dordtsche Synode het beproefden”<sup>173</sup> (303) – there is no need to panic, in Wachter’s opinion, for “[a]n Gods hand wandelende, is ons de zege gewis!”<sup>174</sup> (303). Nevertheless, he does not forget how the synod was accused of having “de onedelste drijfveren”<sup>175</sup> (304) and referred to as “degenen die op vermetele en meesterachtige wijze de woorden van Kotzé brandmerken als een aanval op eene der Belijdenisschriften”<sup>176</sup> (304).

Given the lamentable position the church has been placed in by the court case and the court’s ruling, Wachter is determined to explain the true meaning of it clearly to his readers, so that they can be certain of “welke pligten daarin van God ons zijn opgelegd”<sup>177</sup> (304). But it is a grave task, and he states that it is almost as if his hand is unwilling to take up the task. He proceeds, nevertheless, based on his conviction that it is important for believers to share their thoughts with each other “opdat door onderlinge mededeeling en vergelijking het ons mogelijk worde vaste en eenparige overtuigingen te komen”<sup>178</sup> (304). It is time for them to face the fact that their struggle for the truth has taken on another form, since the church (“gelijk in alle eeuwen”<sup>179</sup>) has come to stand against a force that does not truly understand her “most holy” duty (304).

Wachter portrays the church as a stranger who is forced to take on the form of the world. The church had been advised to ensure that she makes use of a (real) lawyer in the future (305), and Wachter uses this as an example of how the church is obliged to operate according to principles foreign to her nature, and thereby becomes foreordained to lose:

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<sup>172</sup> The sword seems, fallen in the sentencing of the most recent lawsuit, to be floating above her head and sees there are cries of distress from the “private room for prayer” of thousands of praying souls rising to the Lord Sabaoth.

<sup>173</sup> “as the states of Holland tried *before* the Synod of Dordt did”

<sup>174</sup> “walking by God’s side, we are sure of victory”

<sup>175</sup> “the most base motives”

<sup>176</sup> “those who brand Kotzé’s words in an audacious and masterful way as an attack on one of the confession”

<sup>177</sup> “what duties are imposed on us by God”

<sup>178</sup> “that through mutual communication and agreement, it is possible to reach fixed and unanimous convictions”

<sup>179</sup> “same through the ages”

Vooreerst verbiedt een onzer wetten ons dit, daar zij het ons ten pligt maakt de vormen der burgerlijke regtspleging zooveel mogelijk te vermijden; ten tweede verbiedt onze kerklijke inrigting ons dit, daar zij in hare geregtshoven als zoodanig, gelijk het in de Episcopale kerk het geval is - geene plaats hebben; ten derde verbiedt ons Gods Woord dit, dat ons oplegt in vaderlijken toon regt te oefenen ... Ten vierde is het de gewoonte bij de burgerlijke regtbank, aan den vorm zoo veel te hechten, dat soms om des vorms wil, en niet om des inhouds wil, de klagte aangenomen of van de hand gewezen wordt; iets dat mede in strijd is met Gods Woord, dat wil dat in de kerk van Christus, niet de letter, maar de geest heerschen zal. Eindelijk verbiedt ons dit de ervaring van het jongste regtsgeeding; immers, hoewel de klager zijne zaak aan de twee uitstekendste advokaten had toevertrouwd, en zij maanden lang zich er op hadden voorbereid, waren nogtans in den blooten vorm der eenvoudige declaratie zoovele fouten, dat, als onze Moderator gewild had, de klager de zaak had verloren, en de kosten moeten betalen<sup>180</sup> (305).

Nevertheless, Wachter remains professedly hesitant to question the authority that God had appointed, seeing it as a heart-wringing prospect. But he also holds that one's heart wilts at the thought that "de Gereformeerde Kerk het heilig pand der waarheid, door God aan haar toevertrouwd, mogt verraden en ontrouw worden aan haren Heer, aan elkander, aan't tegenwoordige geslacht en de geslachten, die nog geboren zullen worden"<sup>181</sup> (305). Recalling the church and state controversies of the Netherlands in the 17th century, Wachter rejoices in the fact that the Reformed Christians had been unyielding, and that their own Ordinance had laid the ground for the DRC to rule herself according to her own principles (306).

Wachter argues that the court finds itself on a slippery slope with its ruling. There is a possibility that the court will proceed on the road it has taken (306). In order to show what is really at stake, Wachter refers to the sacraments and asks whether the church will be able to maintain the right to withhold the Eucharist from someone placed under

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<sup>180</sup> First, our laws prohibit us this, it is our duty to avoid as much civil justice/law as possible; second, our ecclesial institution prohibits us this, it will have no place in their courts as such, as is the case with the Episcopal church; third, God's Word prohibits us this, as we should practise our fatherly demeanour right ... Fourth, it is common practice at the civil court to attach as much as possible to form, sometimes for the sake of form itself, and not for the sake of content, in determining whether the complaint will be heard or rejected; something which is also in conflict with God's Word, which wants not the letter to reign in the church of Christ, but rather the spirit. Finally, we are prohibited the experience of the most recent legal proceedings; after all, although the plaintiff entrusted his case to two brilliant advocates, and who had prepared themselves for months, there were still so many mistakes just in the form of the simple declaration, that, if our Moderator wanted to, the plaintiff would have lost the case, and would have had to pay the costs.

<sup>181</sup> "the Reformed Church with the sacred pledge of truth, entrusted to her by God, may betray and become unfaithful to her Lord, to each other, to the present generation and the generations that will still be born"

church discipline (307). If not, he argues, one has to ask on whose authority the church actually administers the sacraments: the state's, or Jesus Christ's. This has implications for the church's entire ministry: does someone minister according to the principles of the civil court, or that of God's Word? And are "de zielen, waaraan hij arbeidt"<sup>182</sup> entrusted to him by civil government, or by Jesus Christ, the only head of the church? (307). With Kotzé, it is already the case that someone is authorised, by the state, to administer the Eucharist to hundreds of people, as if he were authorised by Jesus Christ (307). This is not only an infringement of the church, but also of its members' conscience (307).

If a congregation through its council agrees that a minister is no longer fit to serve in the Reformed Church,

... kunnen zij, mogen zij door de regtbank zich laten dwingen, uit zijne hand de heilige bondzegelen te ontvangen, uit zijnen mond Gods heilig Woord te hooren? Kunnen zij de regtbank laten beslissen over zaken, die hun eeuwig heil en dat hunner kinderen aangaan, en die zij aan het door God over hen gestelde kerkbestuur hebben toevertrouwd?<sup>183</sup> (307)

Wachter concludes that if the court proceeds "op den eenmaal ingeslagen weg"<sup>184</sup>, a storm will soon erupt over the church (308), and therefore the church has to understand the cost of the battle she is forced to fight. It is a fight against the greatest of powers, but there is hope in believing that the church will triumph:

De vreeselijkste magt op aarde is de magt der sleutelen met die des zwaards, de geestelijke met de wereldsche vereenigd: met één woord, de magt die door geweld over de gewetens der menschen heerschen wil. Ik zeg dit niet ter ontmoediging. Onze vaders, in de zeventiende eeuw, hebben te Dordt overwonnen: wie weet of niet nog, eer dit jaar is geeindigd, ook wij de overwinning vieren!<sup>185</sup> (306)

Wachter's interpretation of the events succeeds in shifting the focus from Kotzé's unlawful dismissal to a struggle between state and church, and a matter about the freedom of the church. This is achieved by sketching Kotzé's statement about the

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<sup>182</sup> "the souls to which he tends"

<sup>183</sup> ... can she, may she allow herself to be forced by the court, to receive from his holy hand the promise of the covenant, to hear God's holy Word from his mouth? Can she let the court decide about matters, which relates to her everlasting salvation and children, and those entrusted to her by God to the church council

<sup>184</sup> "on the path once chosen"

<sup>185</sup> The most terrible power on earth is the power of the key united with that of the sword, the spiritual united with the worldly: in one word, the power of violence can rule the conscience of people. I don't say this to discourage. Our ancestors, in the seventeenth century, were victorious at Dordt: who knows, perhaps we will also celebrate the victory before the year is out!

Heidelberg Catechism as signifying something *more* than the court could understand: Kotzé's statement was a daring attack on the Heidelberg Catechism launched from the bosom of the Church – the Synod, whose duty it is to protect and preserve the Reformed heritage – and through it a “holy principle” had been trampled upon. Now, with the court's ruling, another essential Protestant principle have come under attack: freedom of conscience.

Our analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism as a pivotal point in the theological controversy of the 1860's can thus be said to have revealed two layers of meaning: firstly, it had become the indicator that liberalism had a dangerous presence in the DRC and should be fought by protecting the Reformed heritage as expressed by the Catechism. Secondly, it served as a signifier of the fact that the DRC found itself in a much bigger struggle than it had anticipated: a struggle for the legal and spiritual autonomy (or freedom) of the church. Moreover, as argued by Evangeliedienaar, this struggle was a litmus test to prove the DRC's faithfulness to God.

It is important to note how the sense-making of Wachter and Evangeliedienaar is already embedded in the mnemonic network. The church's *struggle* for legal freedom was a long one and it was an important part of the immediate context of the DRC at the time. The court's ruling, to a large extent, overruled the control the church had over its own *measures of control*. Wachter's and Evangeliedienaar's interpretations of the events are therefore not merely arbitrary sense-making strategies, but very much informed by a specific background. It is indeed necessary to ask what the difference is between the “context” of an event and the memory culture of a group. When and how does the context from which meaning emerges become part of sense-making strategies?

## 2.4. Remembering resistance: the liberals and *Het Kerkverdedigings Genootschap*

It was not only Wachter and Evangeliedienaar who presented an interpretation of the DRC's situation in the aftermath of the court case. In 1863, and in reaction to the dismissal of Kotzé and Burgers, an interest group named *Het Kerkverdedigings Genootschap* was formed with the aim to protect the rights of ministers and congregants against “unlawful measures” of church meetings (Van der Watt, 1980: 37). This group also served as a forum for liberals to table and discuss their theological dispositions. Although its initial mission was focused on the legal side of the conflict, the organisation and its members also actively participated in the interpretation of what it meant to be Reformed at the time. The theological journal, *De Onderzoeker* (1860-1884), was the main vehicle for their

thought and it served as a reflection of the *Genootschap's* theological influence. The importance of the *Genootschap* and *De Onderzoeker* for the liberal cause is emphasised when in 1870 membership of the *Genootschap* and similar organisations, as well as subscription to *De Onderzoeker*, is encouraged in order to help the movement achieve its goals (DO, 1870: 155).

This section looks at the sense-making strategies of the liberals in the aftermath of the court case against Kotzé and other supposed liberals.

#### 2.4.1. *Resisting suppression and persecution*

From the start, members of the *Kerkverdedigings Genootschap* supported Kotzé's and Burgers' decision to appeal to the high court regarding their dismissal. Within these groups, the DRC's actions were generally seen as a "ketterjagt tegen leeraars"<sup>186</sup> that imperilled the central Protestant principle – freedom:

Ik vraag een ieder die het Protestantsch beginsel is toegedaan, en zijne Christelijke vrijheid waardeert – waar moet het heen? Wie onzer kan die gevolgen overzien? Worden wij niet tot de tijden der Inquisitie terug gevoerd? Hoe! zullen zij levende in de tweede helft der negentiende eeuw, gedwee ons aan geestelijke heerschappij onderwerpen, of aan priesterdwang afhankelijk moeten maken? Dit verhoede God! (toejuiching) ... En geen wonder! Want waar blind vooroordeel, verkeerde ijverzucht, en partijschap de plaats van broederlijke liefde en christelijke vrijheid hebben ingenomen, daar is alle achting en vertrouwen geweken, en de eendragt gebroken. Geachte medechristenen! Wij hebben eene christelijke roeping te volbrengen. Wij worden thans geroepen om voor de christelijke vrijheid te strijden ... Staan wij dan in de vrijheid met welke ons Christus vrijgemaakt heeft, en worden wij niet wederom met het juk der dienstbaarheid bevangen<sup>187</sup> (Kotzé, 1864b: 86).

An overview of the liberal writings of the time show that they, too, viewed themselves as being called to a struggle for the Protestant heritage. As stated above, this heritage was largely seen as centred on freedom. For them, their struggle was ultimately about the

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<sup>186</sup> "heretic hunt against ministers"

<sup>187</sup> I ask everyone devoted to the Protestant principle, and who appreciates its Christian freedom – where to go? Who of us can ignore the consequences? Are we not taken back to the Inquisition? In what way! In the second half of the nineteenth century, would we submit subdued to spiritual reign, or become dependent on the power of priests? God forbids this! (applause) ... And no wonder! Because where blind prejudice, wrongful envy, and partisanship have taken the place of brotherly love and Christian freedom, there all respect and trust have ceased, and unity was broken. Honourable fellow Christians! We have a Christian calling to fulfil. We are currently called to fight for the Christian freedom ... We are then in the freedom with which Christ has freed us, and are not again enslaved by the yoke of servitude.

essence of Protestantism, and the responsibility to protect and fight for it rested on them (Kotzé, 1870: 9). Moreover, their aims, together with that of the *Kerkverdedigings Genootschap*, were seen to be aligned with what it meant to be truly Reformed:

Laat ons onzen pligt doen voor onze kerk, en vooral niet vergeten dat onze eerste pligt niet is te zien of anderen hun pligt doen, maar zelven met wettige handelwijze den naaste voor te gaan en onzen pligt te doen. En vergeten wij onze dure verplichtingen jegens onze kerk niet, laten wij daarbij onze heilige regten niet uit het oog verliezen. Met veel bloed zijn onze regten vrijgekocht, door lang strijden zijn ze verkregen. Waarderen zij ze dan zoo als het ware Gereformeerden past<sup>188</sup> (Herder, 1864: 120).

As opposed to the orthodox, however, the liberals saw the court's ruling as a clear sign that they have made some progress in their struggle: "die onzekerheid is thans geeindigd ... De uitspraak van het Hooge Geregthof is voor duizenden eene bron van dankbare vreugde"<sup>189</sup> (DO 1864c: 115). The same idea is also expressed by Herder:

Door de uitspraak werd het lievelings idee en het lang gekoesterd plan om de vrijzinnigheid eens voor altijd te onderdrukken door eenen leeraar wegens voorgewende ketterij uit de kerk te zetten, verijld<sup>190</sup> (Herder, 1864: 118).

Together with their clearly voiced relief about how Kotzé's case turned out – "die thans vrijer adem halen en voor onzen kerk een beteren tijd te gemoet zien"<sup>191</sup> (DO, 115) – they recall how, already in 1863, they expressed their "vaste vertrouwen"<sup>192</sup> (115) that the Synod's ruling would not endure. Now it has been affirmed that their foundation – "den vasten en breedten grondslag van het Evangelie ... en niet op het fundament van een geest-doodend dogmatisme"<sup>193</sup> (115) – is the true one to build on:

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<sup>188</sup> Let us do our duty for our church, and let us especially not forget that our first duty is not to check that others do their duty, but that we ourselves behave in a just way before our neighbour and do our duty. And forget not our valuable objectives regarding our church, let us not lose sight of our sacred rights. With plenty of blood our rights were redeemed, through long struggles they were obtained. Appreciate them as is fitting for the true Reformed.

<sup>189</sup> "the uncertainty has now ended ... The judgement of the High Court is for thousands a source of grateful joy"

<sup>190</sup> Through the judgement, the favoured idea and the long-cherished plan to suppress liberalism once and for all by banishing a minister from the church for perceived heresy were thwarted.

<sup>191</sup> "who currently breathes more freely and sees a better time coming for our church"

<sup>192</sup> "unwavering belief"

<sup>193</sup> "the solid and broad foundation of the gospel ... and not on the foundation of a mind-numbing dogmatism"



Deze aanwinst is zoo groot, dat zij het hart van elken vrije zoon des Christendoms, die slechts het Woord van God en het Evangelie, en geen feilbaar menschenwerk tot regel des geloofs wenscht te erkend te zien, met innige blijdschap vervult... Onze kerk is eene merkelijke schrede nader aan haar ideaal gekomen<sup>194</sup> (DO, 118).

It is important to note that the “ideal” that they were striving for was, for them, nothing other than true Protestantism. By resisting the orthodox, they were struggling for the preservation of Protestantism. The court’s ruling therefore meant that the “unprotestant” and “unevangelical” tendencies brought into the DRC by the orthodox have been halted (DO, 115). This was seen as a blessing for the church for which God ought to be praised (115). For the liberals, too, the hand of God was thus to be seen in the court case. Even when it became clear that the battle would not be over soon, they continued to express this certainty about their cause (Kotzé, 1870: 9).

Accordingly, *Wachter’s* interpretation of the events was ridiculed (DO, 1864c: 115; 117-118). *Herder* calls his writings “eene quasi-officieele apologie”<sup>195</sup> and attributes it to an “innate proclivity to *special pleading*”<sup>196</sup> (Herder, 1864: 118). Moreover, *Wachter’s* argument is said to rest on “his wrong Pseudo-Calvinist legal principle” and “his obsolete and untenable ecclesial position” (Herder, 118). Instead of *Wachter’s* exhortation that “the alarm bell must be rung because of the dreadful disaster” that has befallen the church, *De Onderzoeker* portrays the events as a much-needed lesson for the leaders of the DRC, in service of the advancement of justice:

Wij verheugen ons omdat daardoor de Synode geleerd heeft – want willen of onwillens, zij zal de les *moeten*<sup>197</sup> aannemen en zich in het vervolg daarnaar *moeten*<sup>198</sup> gedragen – om niet maar naar haar oppermagtige willekeur te werk te gaan, maar steeds de beginselen der regtvaardigheid in het oog te houden. Het Hooge Geregtschhof heeft de Synode tevens eenige wenken gegeven, die zij zich zal moeten ten nutte maken, indien zij zich ooit weder geroepen gevoelt tegen een harer predikanten te ageren<sup>199</sup> (DO, 1864c: 116).

<sup>194</sup> This acquisition is so great that it fills the heart of every free son of Christianity with pure joy, who only wants to see the Word of God and the Gospel, and no fallible work of man, acknowledged as the rule of faith ... Our church has come visibly closer to her ideal.

<sup>195</sup> “a quasi-official apology”

<sup>196</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>197</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>198</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>199</sup> We rejoice as the Synod has learned from it – by choice or not by choice, she will have to take the lesson to heart and behave accordingly in future – not just act according to her own sovereignty, but still retain the principle of fairness. The High Court at the same time gave the Synod advice, which she should use, in case she ever felt called to act against one of her ministers again.



Later, the meaning of the ruling is expressed in even more dramatic terms:

Er is een dam opgeworpen tegen het despotisme, dat heilloos vergift, dat de kracht van elk kerkgenootschap verlamt, zijne ontwikkeling stremt en op verbrokkeling en ontbinding uitloopt. Eene heerschzuchtige meerderheid heeft thans op gevoelige wijze geleerd dat zij gehouden is zich binnen de grenzen der kerklijke wetten en reglementen te bewegen, dat zij tegen haar wetboek niet autocratisch overstaat, maar aan de constitutie onzer kerk gebonden is ... 't Was dus hoog tijd dat die doldriftige meerderheid in haar hollende vaart werd gestuit ... Ieder lid onzer kerk is dus geenszins aan de willekeurige grillen eener dominerende meerderheid onderworpen. 't Is goed dat de Synode dit wete en zich geene regten aanmatige, die in strijd zijn met de constitutie der kerk en met de beginselen eener stipte regtvaardigheid<sup>200</sup> (116).

The court's ruling is also welcomed because of the loss of trust in the church's leadership. The author unhesitatingly states that the trust in church leaders has not only been "shocked" but "broken" (116). The DRC is therefore dependent on the civil court for protecting her against her own leaders:

De kerk of, juister gesproke, diegenen harer hoofdbeampten, in wier handen haar bestuur en hare regering is geplaatst, zijn er meestal op uit om het gezag der kerk en daarmede hun eigen gezag uit te breiden en te versterken. Dit geschied wel eens ten koste der regtvaardigheid. Hoe noodig is het dan niet dat de Staat voor de regten zijner burgers wake en geene overheersching gedooge ... De meerderheid wil onze liberale minderheid de kerk uitdringen en deinst ter bereiking van dit doel niet terug voor middelen die tegen ieder beginsel van vrijheid en regtvaardigheid indruisen, en de maatschappelijke positie harer leden benadeelen<sup>201</sup> (116-117).

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<sup>200</sup> A dam is raised against despotism, that unwholesome poison, which weakens the power of every church denomination, inhibiting their development and eventually leading to dissolution. A power-hungry majority have currently learned in a sensitive way that their actions should be kept within the boundaries of the church's laws and regulations, that they are not autocratic against her laws, but bound to the constitution of our church ... It was therefore about time that the furious majority were stopped in their runaway flight ... No member of our church is thus subjected to the arbitrary whims of the dominating majority. It is good that the Synod knows this and that no rights are presumed, which are in contrast with the constitution of the church and with the principles of a strict fairness.

<sup>201</sup> The church or more correctly her main officials, in whose hands her management and governance are placed, are mainly out to extend and strengthen the church's authority and thereby their own. It sometimes occurs at the expense of righteousness. How important is it not then that the State protects the rights of its citizens and allow no domination... The majority want to drive our liberal minority from the church and do not flinch in pursuing this goal when their methods are in contrast with the very principle of freedom and righteousness, and when the social position harms her members.

Whereas the orthodox felt besieged by the civil court and its underlying principles, the liberals saw their position and principles – imperilled by the orthodox – affirmed by the court’s ruling. The position of Kotzé (and others like him) is portrayed as one of serfdom and captivity (Herder, 1864: 118, 120).<sup>202</sup> He was forcefully bound to the unprotestant way of the leaders – “slechts aan den leiband eener orthodoxistische, dogmatistische factie hebben geloopen”<sup>203</sup> (DO, 1864c: 118) – but now that the “oppermagtige meerderheid”<sup>204</sup> had been restrained, they, as the true Protestants, are ready “to unfold the banner of the real, free Christendom” (118):

... zij vatten thans moed, en heffen de banier van den echt liberalen stichter der Christendoms een weinig omhoog. Wij hebben thans een plekje gronds, waarop wij staan kunnen; laat ons zorgen dat men er ons niet van afdringt, maar zetten wij van daar, in de vreeze onzes Gods en in het vertrouwen op de kracht der waarheid onze pogingen voort om de kerk van allen dwang te ontheffen en haar alzoo eerst regt vruchtbaar op de menschheid te doen werken<sup>205</sup> (118).

For the liberals, then, *their* understanding of what it means to be Protestant and subscribe to the Formulae were officially validated by the court’s acquittal of Kotzé:

... dan blijkt dat onze predikanten niet gebonden zijn aan de letter der Formulieren, en geene slaafsche onderwerping verschuldigt zijn aan iedere zinsnede en elke uitdrukking daarin voorkomende; dat ieder losse uit haar verband gerukte uitdrukking geen leerstuk bewijst; dat de aanduiding van inconsequentien in de Belijdenisschriften geen vergrijp daartegen uitmaakt; verder, dat men geregtigd is de Formulieren onderling met elkander te vergelijken, en aan het Woord van God te toetsen, zonder daardoor met afzetting worden bedreigd of gestraft<sup>206</sup> (DO, 118).

However, it is clear that a specific understanding of Reformation history and the Liberal

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<sup>202</sup> “... wanneer wij voor onze oogen zien, dat men ons en zichzelf een pauselijk juk op den hals, een slavenketen aan den voet legt” (Herder, 1864: 120).

<sup>203</sup> “having walked only on the leash of the orthodox, dogmatic faction”

<sup>204</sup> “sovereign majority”

<sup>205</sup> ... they now gain courage, and raise the banner of the true liberal founder of Christianity a little higher. We currently have a little ground on which we can stand; let us ensure that they do not force us from it, but apply there our efforts, fearful of our God and in the trust of the truth/sincerity of our attempts to free the church from all coercion and thus first let her justice be fruitful for mankind

<sup>206</sup> ... then it seems as if our ministers are not bound to the letter of the Formulae, and owe no servile submission to every sentence and each statement in it; that no single statement taken out of context proves any doctrine; that the indication of inconsistencies in the Confessions does not make a case against them; furthermore, that they are allowed to compare the Formulae with one another, and to test them against the Word of God, without being threatened or punished with dismissal.

Struggle were underscored in order to legitimate this account of the events. Depicting the orthodox as “ketterjagters”<sup>207</sup> comparable to the Roman Catholic Church became a standard element of this interpretation. In 1869, for example, the DRC leadership is again portrayed as being driven by an obsessive “ketter-vrees” (“fear of heretics”) that is said to be in conflict with the “formal principle of the Reformation”, namely “freedom of inquiry” (DO, 1869: 1, 3). Being driven by fear as opposed to being driven by (Protestant) freedom became a marker of distinction between the two groups. Murray’s “closing the door” speech is explicitly named as an example of such fear (2) that works to undermine the very essence of Protestantism:

Als zij, die wij gewoon zijn te beschouwen als onze gidsen op dit gebied, ons komen vertellen: wij dragen de waarheid kant en klaar in zakformaat bij ons, maar gij moet ons op ons woord gelooven, als wij u dit verzekeren, het is gevaarlijk als gij hieromtrent eenigen twijfel openbaart, het zou ‘vreeslijke gevolgen’ kunnen hebben, ‘de deur voor de ketterij zou daardoor opengesteld worden,’ dan is ons antwoord: de vrees, die gij aan den dag legt voor de toekomst van uw waarheidssysteem, boezemt ons het grootst mogelijk wantrouwen daartegen in; uwe poging om iederen twijfel in de geboorte te smoren, om het vrije onderzoek uit vrees voor de gevolgen aan banden te leggen, is ons het klaarste bewijs, dat gij ten eerste afvallig zijt geworden van het levensbeginselen der Hervormde Kerk, en ten tweede dat gij zelf niet die zekere overtuiging van de waarheid van uw stelsel bezit, die wij in onze gidsen verwachten. Gij toont den moed te missen, die waarachtige overtuiging steeds inboezemt<sup>208</sup> (2).

This differentiation (fear and freedom) was complemented by opposing the strict enforcement of confessional boundaries (of the orthodox) to the freedom to question and enquire (promoted by the liberals). Consequently, the orthodox are accused of heresy because of their insistence that the main task of the church consists “in het handhaven der overgeleverde leer tot elken prijs, zij het ook ten koste van de waarheid, zoo als God

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<sup>207</sup> “heretic hunters”

<sup>208</sup> When they, those we usually consider our guides on this terrain, came to tell us: we carry the truth in pocket format with us – done and dusted, but you have to take our word for it, when we assure you of it, it is dangerous if you show any doubt about it, it could have ‘terrible’ consequences, ‘the door for the heresy would be opened by your doubt,’ then our answer is: the fear, which you show for the future of your system of truth, we inspire the biggest distrust against; your attempt to stifle every doubt at birth, to restrict the free investigation of fear of the consequences, is our clearest evidence, that you first started rebelling against the life principles of the Reformed Church, and second that you yourself are not convinced of the truth of your system, which we expect of our guides. You lack the courage, which still inspires true conviction.

ze ons in onzen tijd doet kennen”<sup>209</sup> (DO, 1869: 1). This “unprotestant position” (2) is said to treat the confessions as a collection of “onfeilbare orakelspreuken”<sup>210</sup> (2) against which no objection may be made.

The orthodox is accused of putting the Heidelberg Catechism to the service of fear, mistrust and uncertainty by way of a specific application of it. This, it is argued, is not only heretical, but also promotes disbelief “van de ergste soort”<sup>211</sup> (DO, 1869: 1). For the liberals, divine truth is “bestand ... tegen het scherpzinnigst onderzoek en die, juist omdat ze uit God is”<sup>212</sup> (1). The orthodox attempt to “protect” the truth by a majority vote was therefore ridiculed by them:

Ze moest ‘ten strengste gehandhaafd worden,’ niet omdat zij de waarheid was - over die vraag wilde de Synode geen vrije discussie toelaten - maar omdat zij de kerkleer was. Deze handelwijze verdient, onzes inziens, de sterkste afkeuring. Van tweeën één: of de kerkleer is niet de volkomen uitdrukking der waarheid, en dan is het niet noodig – of liever dan is het eene zeer slechte en ongodsdienstige daad – haar ten strengste te handhaven; of de kerkleer is wél in alle deelen de waarheid, maar dan is ook de vrees, dat zij zich zelve niet zal kunnen handhaven, niet alleen ongegrond, maar een bewijs van zeer groote ongeloofvigheid. Men vreest voor de toekomst der kerkleer, als men de vrijheid laat om bezwaren tegen haar in te brengen ... hoe is dit mogelijk bij de overtuiging dat de kerkleer de volle waarheid is? Op den duur vermag men immers niets tegen de waarheid! En men ontkent immers de waarheid eener stelling niet enkel voor zijn plezier of uit willekeur!<sup>213</sup> (DO, 1869: 2).

It should be noted, of course, that the liberals’ rejection of this frenzied concern for the protection of the pure and true Protestant identity is founded on *their* claim to this very

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<sup>209</sup> “in maintaining the handed down doctrine at all costs, be it even at the expense of the truth, as God knows us in our time”

<sup>210</sup> “infallible oracle proverbs”

<sup>211</sup> “of the worst degree”

<sup>212</sup> “able to withstand ... the critical investigation and that, precisely because they are of God”

<sup>213</sup> It had ‘to be enforced strictly,’ not because it was the truth – the Synod would not allow any free discussion about this question – but because it was the church doctrine. This conduct deserves, in our view, the strictest condemnation. One of two: or the church doctrine is not the comprehensive expression of the truth, and then it is not necessary – or rather then it is a very bad and unreligious act – to enforce it strictly; or the church doctrine is in fact in all part true, but then also the fear that it will not be able to preserve itself, is not only unfounded, but proof of large incredulity. They fear the future of the church doctrine, if they allow the freedom to make objections against it ... how is it possible that the church doctrine is the complete truth? Eventually, one can do nothing against the truth! And indeed, someone does not deny the truth of a statement for their own pleasure or by caprice!

identity. The liberals identified closely and explicitly with the Reformers. In accordance with the famous words attributed to Luther – “here I stand, I can do no other” – a person’s conscience was regarded as a legitimate starting point for critical engagement with the church’s teaching. Doubt is therefore praised as an inclination that may assist the church in moving closer to the truth. But because of their own unbelief and lack of trust, the orthodox were said to be unable to welcome “zulke twijfelaars”<sup>214</sup> in their midst as true descendants of the Reformation (DO, 1869: 1):

Aan dit ongeloof is het te wijten, dat zij, in plaats van welkom te heeten als waardige afstammelingen der kerkhervormers, in plaats van zich te verblijden over de door den twijfel verschaftte gelegenheid om het ware in de oude meeningen in helderder licht te stellen en het valsche daarin prijs te geven, er integendeel terstond op bedacht zijn om voortaan den toegang tot de kerk zooveel mogelijk voor alle zelfstandige denkers te sluiten en de aanranders de oude leer, die reeds leeraars der kerk zijn, er uit te stooten<sup>215</sup> (DO, 1869: 1).

In order to further strengthen the argument that doubt is to be embraced, it is, ironically, argued that the Reformed church itself was born from heresy. And, as was often done, the Belgic Confession is quoted in order to endorse the argument against the strict application of the Formulae:

Mogt de overtuiging ook spoedig doordringen dat de kerk wel wat beters te doen heeft dan ketters op te sporen! De Gereformeerde Kerk werd in ketterij geboren, waarom zou zij dan door hare overmatige ketter-vrees zich gedragen als of zij zich over hare afkomst schaamde? Waarom zouden wij niet hopen dat de tijd komen zal, waarin de kerk die leeraars, die het regt van vrij onderzoek - het formeele grondbeginsel der Reformatie - handhaven, als hare trouwste zonen aan haar hart zal drukken, waarin zij van niets meer doordrongen zal zijn dan van de overtuiging, in Artikel 7 der NGB uitgesproken: “Men mag de gewoonte niet gelijkstellen bij de waarheid Gods, noch de groote menigte, noch te oudheid, noch de successie van lijden of personen, nog de conciliën, decreten of besluiten, want de WAARHEID IS BOVENAL”<sup>216</sup> (DO 1869: 3).

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<sup>214</sup> “such doubters”

<sup>215</sup> This disbelief is due to them, instead of welcoming the worthy descendants of the church reformers, instead of rejoicing over the door of doubt providing opportunity to show the truth of the old views in more illuminating light and to abandon the old falsities, to renounce them in contrary and immediately plot to deny henceforth all independent thinkers and assaulters/challengers of the old doctrine access to the church as far as possible, even those already ministers of the church.

<sup>216</sup> May the conviction quickly penetrate that the church does have better things to do than detecting heretics! The Reformed Church was born from heresy, why would she then conduct herself excessively in terms of fear of heretics as if she is ashamed of her origins? Why would we not hope that the time will come, where the church of the ministers, who preserve the right of free investigation – the formal

For the liberals then, Kotzé's questioning of the Catechism unleashed a series of persecutions of which they were the victims. They were put in a position of serfdom and captivity by the leaders of the church. They compared their own position to that of the early Reformers, and the orthodox were likened to the Roman Catholic Church. They, too, saw themselves as the gatekeepers of Protestantism and specifically of the freedom brought about by the Reformation. In their eyes, they embodied this freedom and acted from it, whereas the orthodox's actions were driven by fear and suffered from a lack of faith. They also saw God's hand in the court's ruling, which gave them hope and courage: they were making progress in their struggle.

#### *2.4.2. Resisting dogma, promoting principles*

An important aspect of the liberal argument is that there is a distinction between the formulations of faith of the Reformation and the principles of faith that enabled that formulations in the first place. In some cases, the differences between the orthodox and the liberals were formulated along these lines, as can be seen in this example from 1870:

“De *meerderheid* wilde boven alles de kerkleer handhaven, d.i. de godgeleerde meeningen van drie predikanten uit de 16de eeuw (Ursinus, Olevianus en Guido de Bres) en van die leden der Dordtsche Synode van 1618–19, die de Remonstranten uit de kerk gebannen hebben; de *minderheid* zag in dit streven om aan de leerstukken van feilbare mensen een voor altijd gelden gezag toe te kennen eene miskenning van de beginselen der Reformatie”<sup>217</sup> (DO, 1870: 154).

These arguments are particularly interesting because they draw on certain aspects of the past to negate other aspects of it. To read these arguments through this lens highlights the inconsistencies embedded in them. The ability of the Reformed Confessions to contain timeless truths is denied on the grounds of the timeless principles “discovered” by the Reformers. One set of timeless truths is thereby favoured above another, on the basis of the perceived intention of historical figures:

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foundation of the Reformation – where her most faithful sons will touch her heart, where she will not be penetrated by anything despite the conviction, in Article 7 of the DRC which states: “... we must not consider human writings equal to the divine writings, nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of times or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for TRUTH IS ABOVE ALL ELSE”

<sup>217</sup> “The *majority* wanted to maintain the church doctrine above all else, i.e. the god-learned views of three ministers from the 16th century (Ursinus, Olevianus and Guido de Bres) and of the members of the Synod of Dordt of 1618–19, those the Remonstrants banished from the church; the minority saw in this effort to bestow authority once and for all upon dogma of fallible human beings a disregard for the principles of the Reformation.”

En ook zij waren te zeer overtuigd, dat ook zij slechts ‘ten deele kenden,’ dan dat het voor een oogenblik bij hen kon opkomen om te meenen dat, na vijftien eeuwen van dwaling, het volle licht der waarheid he nu op een bestraald had, zoodat zij het recht zouden hebben om voor alle volgende geslachte eene verbindende leer vast te stellen. Men eert dus de Hervormers niet, maar miskent hunne beginselen, als men hen als onfeilbare tolken der waarheid gaat behandelen ... Drie eeuwen zijn er verlopen sedert Guido de Bres, Ursinus en Olevianus ... hunne van der vroegere kerk verschillende opvatting der christelijk waarheid op schrift hebben gebracht. Wat zouden zij bedenkelijk het hoofd schudden, indien zij thans konden vernemen, dat men nu nog in eene Protestantsche Kerk – eene kerk, die in ketterij haren oorsprong had – niet die minste afwijking wil dulden van woorden, die zij zelve ongetwijfeld niet slechts als eene gebrekkige uitdrukking van hun eigen geloof, maar ook als eene onvolmaakte opvatting van de godsdienst van Jezus hebben aangemerkt! ... Zoodra men de *leerstukken of woorden* der Hervormers als onfeilbaar, als iets dat voor alle tijden moet geldig blijven, gaat aanmerken, wordt men onmiddellijk ontrouw aan hunne *beginselen*. En afwijking van hunne beginselen is eene veel ergere ketterij dan afwijking van hunne bijzondere leerstukken. De strijd kwam dus eigenlijk hierop neer. De meerderheid streed tegen de kleinere soort van ketterij: afwijking van de *leerstukken* der stichters der kerk. De minderheid streed tegen de grootere soort van ketterij: schending van de *beginselen* der stichters. En omdat in ieder genootschap alles aankomt op die handhaving van zijne *beginselen*, daarom verdient de minderheid de volle sympathie van allen die de Hervorming liefhebben ...<sup>218</sup> (155).

A similar logic is present in an article by M in 1863 that specifically deals with the 300th commemoration of the Catechism (M, 1863f: 35). After quoting from G.D.J. Schotel’s book on the origin and reception of the Catechism, M asks whether Olevianus and Ursinus

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<sup>218</sup> And they were too confident that also they ‘knew only in part,’ for it to occur to them even just for a moment that it could imply that, after fifteen centuries of error, the full light of the truth has now become irradiated, so that they would have the right to determine the binding doctrine for all future generations. Therefore men do not honour the Reformers, but disregard their principles, if they are treated as infallible interpreters of truth ... Three centuries have elapsed since Guido de Bres, Ursinus and Olevianus ... have put their different views of the Christian truth in writing. How they would shake their heads, if they could currently hear that those now in the Protestant Church – a church with its origins in heresy – will not allow the least deviation from words, which they themselves without a doubt meant not only as an inadequate idea of their own faith, but also identified as an imperfect idea of the religion of Jesus! ... The moment one identifies the dogma or words of the Reformers as infallible, as something that should be valid for all of time, one immediately becomes untrue to their principles. And deviating from their principles is far worse heresy than deviating from their particular dogma. The struggle therefore actually boils down to this. The minority fought against the larger kind of heresy: the undermining of the principles of the founders. And because in every denomination everything comes down to maintaining their *principles*, the minority deserves the full sympathy of everyone who adores the Reformation ...



would ever have imagined that their work would soon be made “een regel des geloofs voor alle volgende eeuwen zoude verheffen”<sup>219</sup> (35), and whether they expected or desired that

... drie eeuwen later de Synode eener Christelijke, en wel eener Protestantche kerk, eenen evangeliedienaar, eenen verkondiger van Christus en dien gekruist, met uitzetting uit de kerk zoude bedreigen, omdat hij zich met een gedeelte van een antwoord op eene enkele vraag in dien Catechismus niet vereenigen kon<sup>220</sup> (35).

Ursinus and Olevianus’ intention or opinion is therefore exalted and given authority above their work.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, M does not only speak on behalf of Olevianus and Ursinus, but also interprets St. Paul on their behalf when he suggests that the authors of the Catechism would have reprimanded the Synod of the DRC about the way they treated J.J. Kotzé in 1862. One form of authority of the past (Paul, Ursinus, Olevianus) is used to negate another form of authority of the past (the Heidelberg Catechism). According to M, the authors of the Catechism would have confronted the Synod by asking:

Mannen, broeders! Waarom doet gij deze dingen? Wij zijn ook menschen van gelijke bewegingen als gij, waarom verheft gij dan onzen arbeid als waren wij ‘Goden die de menschen zijn gelijk geworden, en tot u zijn nedergekomen.’ Och, of wij u wederhouden mogten dat gij ons niet offerdet?<sup>222</sup> (35).

M acknowledges the fact that the church order gives the church the right to apply the Confessions in a legalistic way, but in an attempt to qualify this right, he points out that the Belgic Confession (article 7) also gives every member of the church the right and responsibility to test the Confessions against the Bible. According to M, the majority of ministers honour this central *principle* of Protestantism, but reminds his readers that this majority “feitelijk zich niet langer in *alles* met onze belijdenisschriften vereenigt, ja zelfs bepaald onregtzinnig is op het punt der predestinatie, dat van den tijd der Dordsche

<sup>219</sup> “a rule of faith for advancing all future centuries”

<sup>220</sup> ... three centuries later the Synod of a Christian, and indeed a Protestant church, a minister, a promulgator of Christ and His crucifixion, would threaten his expulsion from the church, because he could not agree with a part of one question in the Catechism.

<sup>221</sup> This argument relates differently to the past than, for example, Schotel’s argument quoted in *De Onderzoeker* of 1864: “Ursinus, wij erkennen het gaarne, was een groot man, uitmuntende door kunde en geleerdheid, maar Ursinus was mensch; zijn geschrift heeft hooge waarde, maar het is en blijft het geschrift eens menschen. Ursinus was onvolmaakt, feilbaar; hij kon dwalen. Zijn werk is onvolkomen en kan feilen bevatten” (DO, 1864d: 38).

<sup>222</sup> “Men, brethren! Why do you do these things? We are also people subject to the same passions as you, why do you exalt our work as if we were ‘Gods who became like man, and came down to you.’ Oh, might we keep you from offering to us?”



Synode tot aan het einde der 18de eeuw als hoofdzaak der kerkleer werd aangemerkt”<sup>223</sup> (35). Once again, the authority of the tradition is used to defy another element of it. But this is only possible if the tradition can be said to have an essence, i.e. principles that are more important than other elements of the tradition. Here the disregard for historical distance seen earlier is turned on its head in order to argue that, given the 300-year distance between then and now, some beliefs no longer apply although some principles still do. An attempted break with tradition is therefore argued in the name of that very tradition.

Another noteworthy strategy, somewhat contradictory to the one just mentioned, is M’s emphasis on the humanity of historical figures (here Paul, Olevianus and Ursinus). Because everyone shares in that humanity, he argues, there is also equality among people across time. At the same time, he therefore claims the authority of the past and legitimates his own position in the present. The past as a larger than life phenomenon is deconstructed by M in an inconsistent way. He claims the authority of the authors of the Catechism, but denies (or at least qualifies) the authority of the Catechism itself. Continuity with the past is created by constructing a shared piety across time and this creates room for certain discontinuities without the sense that identity is lost, or that an unbridgeable break in time has occurred. For M, the past as presented to us through a virtuous historical hero has more weight than the past presented by a confessional document. Why Ursinus and Olevianus have any moral authority in his eyes, and why that authority can be disconnected from the Catechism, is not a question he answers.

A third example of favouring principles at the cost of dogma comes from a speech of P.J. Kotzé at the annual meeting of the *Kerkverdedigings Genootschap* in 1870. Here the principle at play is less obvious, but resembles an idea that there is “true faith” that is threatened by “dogmatic faith” as expressed in confessional documents:

O, er zijn er, voor welke de liefde en de godsdienst van Jezus nog heilig zijn; dezulken, die een zuiver hart hooger schatten dan geloofsbelijdenissen en kerklijke leerstelsel, voor wie koude, verroeste vormen en denkbeelden van vroegere tijden, een klinkend metaal of luidende schel geworden zijn. Maar die weinigen, helaas! zij verliezen zich onder de menigte door den geest van onverdraagzaamheid en heerschzucht gedreven, veel onheilig vir op het altaar brengen. Ach, dat men nog zoo weinig in den geest van Jezus is doorgedrongen! ... Immers, niet het uitwendige, niet het belijden van kerklijke

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<sup>223</sup> “basically do not agree anymore with everything in our confessional writings, yes they are even downright incorrect on the point of predestination, that doctrine which since the time of the Synod of Dordt until the end of the 18th century mainly characterised the Church’s doctrine”

leerstelsels en formulieren, niet de vormen en woorden des geloofs, maar het inwendige, het verlangen der ziel naar God, niet het geregeld en vlijtig bezoeken van kerken en bedehuizen, niet het zeggen: Heere! Heere! maar den wil des hemelschen Vaders te doen, maakt eigenlijk des godsdienst uit. Was er geen godsdienst op aarde toen men nog van geene kerken en formulieren wist?<sup>224</sup> (Kotzé, 1870: 9).

To summarise, in the liberals' argument, we see distinctions between the formulations of faith and the principles of faith. Although, in these arguments, both of these aspects are historically grounded in the Reformation, one is granted validity in the present above the other without much explanation. Some beliefs, it is argued, are no longer relevant after 300 years, but principles are. A break with tradition is thus justified in the name of tradition.

The inconsistencies in dealing with historical distance are also visible in the ways the authors of the Catechism are honoured. They are seen as remarkable people whose intentions and opinions are to be followed, yet their work does not carry the same authority. At the same time, the distance between the past and the present is collapsed when the Ursinus and Olevianus are depicted as merely human – a humanity the people in the present share and which makes their opinions equally important.

#### *2.4.3. Progress and/as tradition?*

The liberal emphasis on and understanding of freedom as essential Protestant principle was also appropriated in arguments about progress. These arguments place the Confessions in opposition to freedom and progress, as is evident in an 1865 article, "De Formulieren versus de Vrijheid en Ontwikkeling der Kerk". The author, K, acknowledges the need for symbols or confessions through which a church expresses its faith. However, he immediately points out that there is a symbiosis between the strictness with which these symbols are maintained and the freedom that the church enjoys:

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<sup>224</sup> Oh, there are those, to whom the love of and faith in Jesus are still sacred; such people consider a pure heart as more valuable than confessions and church dogma, for which outdated forms and images of earlier times have become sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. But these few, alas! They lose themselves among the crowd driven by the spirit of intolerance and despotism, many unholy to offer on the altar. Oh, that they have so sparsely been permeated by the spirit of Jesus! ... After all, not the exterior, not the confessions of the ecclesial doctrine and formulae, not the forms and words of faith, but the interior, the longing of the soul for God, not the regular and diligent visiting of churches and places of worship, not saying, "Lord! Lord!", but doing the will of the Heavenly Father actually comprises the religion. Was there no religion on earth before they knew about churches and formulae?

Maak zij ze tot onfeilbaren regel des geloofs, gedooft zij geene enkele afwijking van de letter der leer, daarin uitgesproken, dan oefenen die Geschriften op die ontwikkeling der Kerk een belemmerenden invloed uit, ja, worden haar tot een vloek<sup>225</sup> (K, 1865: 37).

It is clear, that here, too, it is not the Formulae itself, or any specific articles, that are under attack, but how the relation to them is managed and controlled. It is interesting to note what type of relation K supports and how he formulates that relation. He prefers “innocent assertions” that cause “no harm to anyone”:

Indien nu de Kerk zich op een vrij standpunt tegenover de Formulieren stelde, dan zoude die stelling der Nederl. Geloofsbelijdenis daar staan als eene zeer onschuldige bewering, die niemand deerde. Maar nu het standpunt der Formulieren juist het standpunt is, waarop onze Kerk zich heeft geplaatst, nu staat die bewering als een gebiedende letter tegen ons over, die onderwerping eischt<sup>226</sup> (38).

Still, K appears to be very attached to the Protestant tradition and the “faith of our fathers” as expressed in the Formulae and handed down to the church. He firmly states that a plea for more freedom in the church does not imply that the Christian Protestant faith has become old-fashioned or worthless (37):

God beware ons, mijn lezer, dat dit alzoo zijn zoude. Neen, in menig opzigt mag die eeuw der Belijdenisschriften met haren geloofsmoed ons tot voorbeeld zijn<sup>227</sup> (37).

He seems to find security in the fact that their (the Protestants of the present day) faith is the very *same* faith for which their forbearers made such big sacrifices. But he argues that there is a difference between the Formulae (“die Geschriften”) and the faith of the fathers. The Formulae are but “de vormen waarin hun geloof zich heeft uitgesproken”<sup>228</sup> (37), and its restriction lies in the fact that it is “de producten der toenmalige ontwikkeling

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<sup>225</sup> If they make them into infallible rules of faith, tolerating no single deviation from the letter of the doctrine expressed therein, the Scriptures exercise an inhibiting influence on the Church, yes, becoming a curse for her.

<sup>226</sup> If the Church now took a free stance upon the Formulae, the expression of the Belgic Confession would stand there as an utterly innocent assertion, bothering no one. But now that the assertion of the Formulae is precisely an assertion, on which our Church stands, now that assertion stands as an authoritative assertion over us, requiring subjugation.

<sup>227</sup> Heaven forbid, my reader, that it would be so. No, in many respects the century of Confessional writings with their courageous faith may be an example to us

<sup>228</sup> “the forms in which their faith is expressed”

en wetenschap”<sup>229</sup> (37). Because the Formulae are in the first place faith casted in specific “scientific forms,” he argues, science has the right to review and revise its own work. If this scientific right is denied, faith would claim for itself the right to silence science – “Of mag het geloof de wetenschap het zwijgen oplegge?”<sup>230</sup> K warns that if faith is to demand the freedom to silence science, it will be to its own detriment: “’t Zal zich hoe langer zoo verder van de realiteit verwijderen en noodzakelijk in bijgeloof en fanatisme ontaarden”<sup>231</sup> (37).

But right after arguing that confessions are only problematic because of the “form” in which it presents the faith, he goes on to argue that the content of the confessions should also be subjected to scientific scrutiny. He does so by distinguishing between expressions of faith in the confessions (e.g. if they declare that the Word of God is contained in the Bible) and claims of knowledge. Article V of the Belgic Confession constitutes such a problematic “claim of knowledge” in his view:

Maar wanneer dat Symbool mij leert, gelijk onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis, Art V, zulks doet, dit ik ‘al wat in den Bijbel begrepen is zonder eenigen twijfel gelooven’ moet, dan beweegt het zich op een gebied, waar het door de wetenschap gecontroleerd en terecht gewezen kan worden<sup>232</sup> (37).

As explication, he points to, amongst others, the story of Noah, the Israelites in the desert, the standstill of sun and moon, and Hiskia’s shadow. However, in his own eyes, his argument is not an attempt to deny biblical authority, but to uphold it. If the church wishes to keep “haren invloed op de gemoederen ... en vruchtbaar en zegenend op deze weren”<sup>233</sup> (37) in the face of the continuous scientific formation and development of her congregations, he argues, she should keep track of the “ontwikkelingsgang”<sup>234</sup>. This implies that the Formulae can only be seen as articulation of the “Protestant Christian faith of the forefathers” and not as “infallible scientific textbooks” (37). If this distinction is not made, “dan rigt zij zelve een muur der afscheiding tusschen haar en hare leden op en maakt deze van haar afkeerig”<sup>235</sup> (37). K is very clear about his own reverence for the

<sup>229</sup> “the products of the former/past development and science”

<sup>230</sup> “Or may the faith silence science?”

<sup>231</sup> “It will increasingly remove faith farther from reality and necessarily let it degenerate into superstition and fanaticism.”

<sup>232</sup> But when the Symbol teaches me, like our Belgic Confession, Art V does this, stating that I should ‘believe everything contained in the Bible without any doubt’, it moves on the terrain where it can be controlled and disproved by science.

<sup>233</sup> “her influence on the minds ... and be fruitful and blissful therein”

<sup>234</sup> “direction of development”

<sup>235</sup> “then she constructs a wall of separation between her and her members and make them averse to her”

## Bible:

Geen kostelijker geschenk kan zij hun aanbieden dan den Bijbel. Dat Boek toch maakt wijs tot zaligheid. Maar wanneer de Kerk eischt dat men [den] ganschen inhoud des Bijbels als het onfeilbare Woord van God zal aannemen en zich aan al zijne uitspraken zal onderwerpen en zij alleen hen, die dat doen, voor geloovige zonen wil erkennen, dan maakt zij zich belagchelijk en men breekt met haar. En ware dat nog maar alles. Maar zij brengt alzoo den Bijbel in minachting en bevordert het ongeloof. Door den eisch dat men alles wat in den Bijbel staat als ontwijfelbare waarheid zal gelooven, maakt zij dat menigeen niets gelooft<sup>236</sup> (37).

The DRC is by no way obliged to take the route they are taking, argues K. They are actively choosing to turn the Formulae into “een gebiedende letter ... die onderwerping eischt”<sup>237</sup> (38). Accordingly, he states that there is no room for “the free practising of theology” (38) within the DRC and that theology has been reduced to “dienaresse der kerkleer”.<sup>238</sup> It can also not be expected that the Stellenbosch Seminary would be able to produce any real theologians, he writes, but they are doomed to engender ministers “die in wetenschappelijke ontwikkeling eenige eeuwen ten achteren zijn, en de behoeften van hunnen tijd niet verstaan”<sup>239</sup> (38). Slowly but surely, he argues, the church will close its doors to all development, and also to all developed/educated ministers and members, and this is because she is offering her well-being to “eene verkeerd begrepene roeping”<sup>240</sup>:

... en in plaats van ons op de baan des vooruitgangs te vergezellen en onze ontdekkingen ten dienste van het geloof te gebruiken en tot veredeling en heiliging van ons hart aan te wenden roept zij een akelig en onheilspellend wee over ons uit, en zegt ons dat wij den breeden weg des verderfs opgaan<sup>241</sup> (38).

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<sup>236</sup> You can offer them no more precious gift than the Bible. That Book teaches of salvation. But when the Church requires that people should adopt the content of the Bible as God’s infallible Word and submit to its declarations and only those, to recognise people as faithful followers, she becomes ridiculous and people break with her. And were it only this. But she brings the Bible into disrepute like this and enhances incredulity. Through the requirement that one should believe everything in the Bible as the unwavering truth, she causes many people to not believe.

<sup>237</sup> “An authoritative letter ... which demands submission”

<sup>238</sup> “servants of the church doctrine”

<sup>239</sup> “who are some centuries behind when it comes to scientific development, and who do not understand the needs of their time”

<sup>240</sup> “a calling that is misunderstood”

<sup>241</sup> ... and instead of accompanying us on the path of progress and use our discoveries in service of the faith and to improve and hallow our heart, she calls out a terrible and ominous woe over us, and tells us that we are following the broad way to destruction.

K stresses the similarities between the faith of the present and the faith of the past. For him it is the same faith, and he finds comfort in that. Yet, he sees a difference between the faith (of the fathers) and expressions of faith (the form of the faith). He also makes a further distinction regarding the content of confessions: between expressions of faith and claims of knowledge. There are certain shortcomings in the confessions with regard to both its form and content, for him, because they come from a different age of development. The church's ability to keep up with the times is dependent on how they relate to their confessions. According to K, the DRC is on the wrong track.

## 2.5. Hofmeyr and Murray as gatekeepers of the Reformed tradition?

The potentiality of the Heidelberg Catechism as a symbol to be appropriated in theological controversies is further heightened when the theologies of Hofmeyr and Murray are analysed. Although they were influential agents in the struggle against liberalism, and also came to be remembered as such, Vincent Brümmer has persuasively argued that their respective theologies cannot unanimously be judged as agreeing with Reformed orthodoxy as expressed in the Formulae of Unity.

Hofmeyr was in open conflict with the representatives of liberal theology long before the Synod of 1862. Already in 1854, he published a series of articles in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* addressing certain objections he had against liberal theology (Brümmer, 2013: 67). In 1860, he published a brochure entitled *Een getuigenis tegen de hedendaagse dwaling*. According to Brümmer (2013: 67), this was in direct reaction to the first issue of *De Onderzoeker* in January 1860. In response to this, J.J. Kotzé published a series of eleven articles in *De Onderzoeker* under the pseudonym XYZ.

Furthermore, in 1868, in response to the establishment of the *Vrye Protestantse Kerk* by D.P. Faure, Hofmeyr published *Vier Leerredenen tegen de Hedendaagsche Dwaling of de sogenaamde Moderne Theologie*. According to Brümmer (2013: 68-109), it is conspicuous that Hofmeyr never appeals to the teachings of the church or the confessional documents in his arguments against liberal theology. His issue with the adherents of liberal theology was not founded on their deviation from the church's teachings or confessions. For him (Brümmer, 2013: 69-70), these were secondary issues. Even though this is because the theological issues at stake are for him much more than that, it is an observation that is relevant for the argument here. For Hofmeyr, it is the "ewige gewigtige stryd, vir of teen Jesus Christus die Saligmaker van sondaars, vir of teen die Heilige Gees, wat van sonde

oortuig en ons na Jesus lei”<sup>242</sup> (Hofmeyr, 1868: 17) that was at stake and he took it for granted that his understanding of it was consistent with the confessions (Brümmer, 2013: 109).

Hofmeyr identifies two types of orthodoxy: the dead orthodoxy of reason and the living orthodoxy of the mind and heart (Brümmer, 109). The latter was the orthodoxy which Hofmeyr advocated. Accordingly, he interpreted the confessions from a specific understanding of spirituality. In cases where an interpretation of the confessions could not be made to fit his spirituality, he was prepared to criticise it.

One such example is with regards to the doctrine of atonement. In his explanation of atonement, Hofmeyr openly contradicts the Heidelberg Catechism. Whereas the liberal theologians, according to Hofmeyr, underplay justification and God’s action in it, the Heidelberg Catechism’s Sunday 23 overstates it and thereby separates justification and sanctification too much for Hofmeyr’s liking (Brümmer, 2013: 96-97). Hofmeyr’s and Kotzé’s critiques of the Catechism were therefore directed at the same section (Sunday 23). Moreover, Hofmeyr explains this deficiency of the Catechism as having the “eienaardige kenmerk van sy tyd”<sup>243</sup> (Hofmeyr quoted in Brümmer, 96) – a remark that reminds one of K’s argument discussed in the previous section. In certain aspects, Hofmeyr dismissed the Catechism as a product of its time and even holds that it “gaan dan op ’n ander uiterste aan die dwaal”<sup>244</sup> (Brümmer, 109).

Hofmeyr’s own subscription to the Formulae of Unity can therefore be said to have been rather relaxed. In 1853, he expressed his view as follows:

Ons Sinodale Kommissie wil nie ’n slaafse onderwerping aan die kerkleer hê nie, maar ’n vrye en selfstandige belydenis van die waarheid, wat gereformeerde genoem kan word en wat nie die hoofwaarhede omverwerp nie<sup>245</sup> (Hofmeyr quoted in Brümmer, 109).

Regarding the theology of Andrew Murray, Brümmer also holds that, although he consistently defended the “teaching of the church” as being in compliance with the Formulae of Unity in his debate with the liberals, he did not go to great lengths to show that or how it was the case (Brümmer, 2013: 238). Rather, the impression is created that what he calls “the teaching of the church” is merely synonymous with his own theological

<sup>242</sup> “eternal momentous battle, for or against Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners, for or against the Holy Spirit, which convinces us of sin and leads us to Jesus”

<sup>243</sup> “peculiar feature of his time”

<sup>244</sup> “goes astray at another extreme”

<sup>245</sup> Our Synodal Commission does not want a slavish submission to the doctrine, but a free and independent confession of the truth, which can be called reformed and which does not undermine the main truths



convictions and by definition in agreement with reformed orthodoxy (238).

J.J. Kotzé did not hesitate to accuse Murray of being unprotestant. In 1870 and 1871, Kotzé argued (sometimes under the pseudonym XYZ) that with regard to the doctrine of predestination, Murray was in disagreement with the Canons of Dordt (Kotzé, 1871: 9-12; DO, 1870: 68, 1871: 9, 21, 40).

What can be concluded from this, is that the Heidelberg Catechism, together with the Canons of Dordt and the Belgic Confession, was not, in the first place, used by the so-called orthodox side in the Liberal Struggle because of its theological content and value, but because of its symbolic and mnemonic resourcefulness. Although Brümmer tries to make a distinction between the juridical ways in which Hofmeyr and Murray used the Confessions in the struggle against liberalism and their *actual* theological understanding of it, I would argue that their sporadic confessionalism subverted the other theological tendencies they might have had and inhibited the theological discourse of the time – also because they both occupied positions of authority. This is particularly evident in how important the memories of *their* struggle against liberalism became in the case of Du Plessis (see 3.2).

A distinction that can be made, I would argue, is between their *actual* theological contribution to the DRC's understanding of confessions and how their contribution came to be appropriated by memory. In making this distinction, however, we also have to come to terms with and try to understand Hofmeyr's and Murray's own inconsistencies with regard to the content and role of the confessions in the life of the DRC. First of all, their respective contributions to DRC theology and the debate on liberalism should not be bundled together and treated as a singular entity. However, it is clear that the DRC came to remember their stance against liberalism in the name of adherence to the Confessions as a unified front.

As for Hofmeyr's inconsistency regarding the Confessions, there seems to be a disparity between how he considers the Confessions in relation to his own theology and how he considers it in relation to his understanding of the identity of the DRC as a very real historical community. In other words, ideally, Hofmeyr would want the DRC to embrace his theology, but in the face of theological controversy, he chooses a theological argument that would safeguard the community even if it contradicts his theological vision.

Murray, who served as the moderator of the Cape Synod six times, played a different role. As a conservative leader in the church and one who did not openly argue against supposedly traditional ways of interpreting Reformed theology and confessions, he seldom had to *actively* put himself in line with the Reformed tradition. As Brümmer states,



Murray rarely did so. He, too, was concerned with protecting the status quo, i.e. the current identity of the DRC, and because he was the figurehead for the cause of the majority, his theology became coterminous with church theology.

Interestingly, in the 1870 discussion about the orthodoxy of the revivals (referred to in 2.1.1.), this dubious position of Murray and Hofmeyr is duly noted:

Maar wat over deze kwestie in de Synode is gesproken en besloten toont zoo duidelijk mogelijk hoe gaarne eene partij in de kerk, door hare eigene meeningen kortweg met de kerkleer te vereenzelvigen, ieder die eene ander meening is toegedaan als ketter tracht te brandmerken. De verstandige leden der kerk doorzien echter de onrechtvaardigheid en lafhartigheid van zulk eene handelwijze. Slechts de onkundigen kunnen langs dien weg misleid worden<sup>246</sup> (DO 1870: 154).

## 2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how the Heidelberg Catechism became a site of struggle during the Liberal Struggle of the 1860s. Associations with the Catechism were appropriated for specific yet different causes during this time. One significant aspect of this struggle that has transpired is the shared and equally serious commitment to Protestant roots by the opposing sides.<sup>247</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism served as an identity marker for opposing groups. It can be argued that this served as additional fuel to the theological fires of the 1860s and 1870s. Because the struggle was about a shared identity, the controversy was exceptionally rife.

Despite a widespread depiction of the liberals as being indifferent and abusive towards their theological heritage, many of their arguments show an unquestioned acceptance of

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<sup>246</sup> But what was said and decided about the issue in the Synod clearly shows how willingly a group in the church, by frankly identifying her own views with church doctrine, brand anyone who is devoted to another view a heretic. The wise members of the church see through the injustice and cowardice of this method. Only the ignorant can be misled in this way.

<sup>247</sup> This is not a unique feature. Herman Paul shows how opposing arguments are based on shared lemmas in Dutch Protestant memory. "Maar dit [die erfenis] bewaren, zo blijkt uit de lemma's over Calvijn en de Dordtse Synode, viel met allerlei posities in het spectrum tussen conservatisme and progressivisme te verenigen. Trouw aan de vaders van Dordrecht kon impliceren dat de Dordtse Kerkenordening naar de letter moest worden geëerbiedig; het kon ook betekenen dat kerken geroepen werden die internationale oecumene, zoals belichaamd door de Wereldraad van Kerken, te bevorderen. Trouw aan Calvijn kon betekenen dat... de terechtstelling van Michael Servet verdedigd moest worden tegen de bezwaren van 'onze verwekelijkte eeuw.' Maar het kon ook betekenen dat Calvijns principes 'in rapport' met de eigen tijd moesten worden gebracht, zodat de scheiding van kerk en staat of zelfs de democratie met een beroep op de reformator kon worden verdedigd" DordtDordtDordt (Paul, 2009: 36-37).

their Protestant identity and a deep-felt loyalty to it. But because of the controversy about Kotzé, they started to see the Catechism as standing in the way of the certainties secured by the Reformation. For them, these certainties were expressed in principles and not in a strict subscription to the Formulae. Moreover, they were convinced that they were the guardians of this Protestant legacy and that its survival and endurance depended on them. The result of their devotion is, more often than not, an earnest and urgent pursuit to interpret the Protestant tradition and not a simple or aggressive denial of it.

The general depiction of the orthodox side has equally been unmasked by showing, first of all, how it reinterpreted the court's ruling in Kotzé's case following a relatively inconsistent charge against him. Secondly, following Brümmer, it has been argued that the theologies of Hofmeyr and Murray – who came to be remembered as the champions of Reformed orthodoxy in the DRC – can largely not be said to be in accordance with Reformed orthodoxy as expressed in the Formulae.

The two groups participated in the struggle with the threat of a real loss hanging over their heads. The fear the “orthodox” had that even the slightest deviation from the Catechism will rob them of their treasured heritage is comparable to the fear of the “liberals” that any real authority attributed to the Catechism will disinherit them. Two layers of identity forming material can thus be identified: 1) opposing parties find their security in the Protestant past and 2) how the Catechism is employed is central to the preservation of their identity. This brings us back to the earlier distinction between “het goede pand”<sup>248</sup> and the command to “bewaar”.<sup>249</sup> The tension that exists in this space arising between the certainty and vulnerability of tradition constituted an important aspect of this conflict.

It can be argued that the Heidelberg Catechism functioned as a means to solve conflict in the ecclesial community during the Liberal Struggle. Here it is important to distinguish between the theological conflict at the heart of the struggle and the way it manifested as an ecclesial conflict. I would not argue that the theological issue at the heart of the Liberal Struggle was solved – certainly not simply by drawing on the Heidelberg Catechism. However, to a large degree, the DRC as a religious community managed to deal with the tension and division it experienced by distilling complex theological differences to a matter of confessional allegiance (as governed by the subscription formula) – and here the Heidelberg Catechism was remembered as playing a significant role.

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<sup>248</sup> “that good thing/deposit”

<sup>249</sup> “keep/guard/preserve”

Therefore, as I have argued, even though Brümmer holds that Hofmeyr and Murray were not particularly concerned with confessional theology, the ways they participated in the Liberal Struggle – and the ways it was remembered in the DRC – contributed significantly to the identity of the DRC.<sup>250</sup> Despite Brümmer’s argument that Murray’s and, particularly, Hofmeyr’s critiques of liberalism were founded more on their respective spiritualities than on their devotion to church doctrine or the Formulae<sup>251</sup>, arguments founded on piety could not achieve concrete outcomes in the same way that arguments based on the Formulae could. This is of course not only a function of these three confessional documents in themselves, but also of the subscription formula and its application.

In conclusion, we can say that both parties anchored their identities in a particular understanding of the Reformation and the legacy it left with much confidence and commitment. They also shared the conviction that the past has inevitable consequences for the present. The Liberal Struggle stimulated the development of beleaguered identities in both groups.

The important question to ask of this analysis is the following: to what extent can these shared strategies (of sense-making and defence) be said to arise from a *shared* mnemonic framework – in this case, the entanglement of the Heidelberg Catechism and Protestantism? And in what sense did this shared framework either intensify the conflict and/or inhibit any meaningful theological repositioning?

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<sup>250</sup> During the 1959 centenary of the Stellenbosch Seminary, Hofmeyr is remembered as someone who firmly took a stand against liberalism on the basis of “die Skriftuurlike fondament van die belydenisskrifte” (Classen, 1959: 705). Moreover, it is recalled that Hofmeyr – together with Neethling – served on the commission of the Synod of 1862 who had to advise on the different memoranda and motions regarding “de handhaving van de zuiverheid der Leer”

<sup>251</sup> For an evaluation of this aspect of Brümmer’s argument, see Van den Brink (2012: 151-155).

## Chapter 3

# Recollection and Repetition: The Heidelberg Catechism and the Du Plessis Case

## 3.1. Introduction

The memories about the Catechism specifically, and the Formulae of Unity in general, that were formed during the Liberal Struggle become particularly evident in the next big theological controversy that played itself out in the DRC during the late 1920s and early 1930s around the figure of Prof. Johannes du Plessis.

The first part of the chapter deals with the Du Plessis case. It gives a brief overview of the case and then delves deeper into how Du Plessis and his adversaries positioned their own conflict in relation to the Liberal Struggle.

As with the discussion of the Liberal Struggle, I do not attempt to analyse or evaluate the details of the Du Plessis case. I also do not present or scrutinise the different arguments about specific interpretations of the Catechism.<sup>252</sup> Instead, the chapter focuses on the mnemonic parallels created between the Liberal Struggle and the Du Plessis case and how a one-dimensional memory of the Liberal Struggle and the roles of Murray and Hofmeyr in it fed into the Du Plessis case.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the ways in which different types of devotion to the Confessions influenced two discourses that were occurring at the time: the meaning of scientific progress of religious tradition and the need and desirability of confessional revision.

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<sup>252</sup> One of the overarching question of the conflict was whether or not there was room for Du Plessis' viewpoints "within the parameters of the Formulae."

## 3.2. The case of Johannes du Plessis

### 3.2.1. A brief overview

In the memory of the DRC, the Liberal Struggle of the 1860s, despite the court's ruling, was eventually settled in favour of the party which saw itself as the defenders and representatives of Reformed Orthodoxy. In the historiography of the DRC, it became a watershed episode in which the church remained faithful to her heritage and Lord. In addition, it also became an example of God's grace and blessing towards the church. As such, it became an example to be followed and repeated.<sup>253</sup> The Du Plessis case, I will argue, shows the impact that this marriage between recollection and repetition had on the DRC.

Johannes du Plessis<sup>254</sup> became professor at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary in 1916. He obtained the reputation of being an innovative thinker through his journal *Het Zoeklicht* (1923–1932) (Giliomee, 2004: 367). In the journal, he discussed evolution and historical criticism and warned against a rigid application of the Bible and Reformed Confessions. In 1928, a commission of the Curatorium of the Seminary at Stellenbosch laid charges against Du Plessis. He was accused of denying the infallible inspiration of all parts of the Bible, accepting Higher Critical reconstructions of Israel's history, denying Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch, and claiming that Jesus laid aside his divine attributes at the incarnation (Elphick, 2012: 161).

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<sup>253</sup> The magnitude of the Liberal Struggle in the memory of the DRC is particularly evident in the work of T.N. Hanekom. His 1948 dissertation under the supervision of Prof. J.D. du Toit (also known as Totius – an influential Afrikaans theologian and poet) was a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the liberal theology in South Africa. It was entitled *Die Liberale Rigting in Suid-Afrika. 'n Kerkhistoriese Studie*. In his article, *Geskiedskrywing, kondisionering en die konsekwensies vir teologiese vernuwing: 'n begripsanalise van T.N. Hanekom se tipering van die "liberale rigting"*, B.C. Lategan interrogates the impact that Hanekom's interpretation of liberal theology had on the DRC. Lategan asks: "*Hoe tipeer Hanekom as geskiedskrywer die liberale rigting en watter invloed het hierdie tipering op 'n volgende geslag van teoloë se vermoë om die vrae wat deur 'n nuwe tydvak opgewerp word, te hanteer?*" (Lategan, 2003: 104). He argues that Hanekom's interpretation conditioned thinkers who followed him to read their context in a very specific way. Lategan does not hesitate to point out that Hanekom was profoundly influenced by the outcome of the Du Plessis case and that the climate in which he received theological training was not conducive to critical thinking (104). Also referring to Hanekom's work, D.J. Smit states that debates within an often divided Afrikaner community were always somehow construed as debates about liberalism (Smit, 2009: 515).

<sup>254</sup> Much has been written about Du Plessis' life and work, as well as the case against him. See the unpublished dissertation of Erasmus (1986), *Die bediening van Johannes du Plessis (1868-1935) in die Ned. Geref. Kerk met besondere verwysing na sy teologiese denke*, as well as Erasmus's book on Du Plessis, *Johannes du Plessis 1868-1935: baanbreker, verbreker van die gereformeerde geloof* (2009). Another authoritative dissertation about Du Plessis is the one by A.R. Olivier (1990), *Die Kerk en die Du Plessis-saak met besondere verwysing na die ekklesiologiese*.

The Curatorium was not satisfied with Du Plessis' defence of himself and escalated the matter to the Stellenbosch Presbytery. Although the Presbytery twice voted for Du Plessis' acquittal, the Curatorium did not accept its decision. They appealed to the Cape Synod and the Synod eventually expelled Du Plessis from his position at the Seminary in 1930.<sup>255</sup> Du Plessis appealed to the Supreme Court and in January 1932 it ruled in his favour that his expulsion was illegal. Although, on the basis of the court's ruling, a special meeting of the Synod withdrew all charges against Du Plessis on 20 February 1932, he nevertheless remained ousted from the Seminary to "prevent friction" (Nash, 1997: 61). This decision was the outcome of a vote taken by the Synod – 217 against 111. The church council of Stellenbosch also barred him from preaching from its pulpit (Nash, 1997: 61), although he was not under censorship and, hence, eligible to be called within the DRC (Gerdener, 1943: 226).

Despite the fierceness of the conflict, Du Plessis was never unilaterally branded as a villain. After his removal from the Seminary in 1932, 400 students marched to his home to show solidarity (Nash, 1997: 61).<sup>256</sup> Shortly after the court case, attempts to reconcile with him were made by some members of the Seminary. After his death in 1935, various letters to *Die Kerkbode* discussed how he should be commemorated. Ten years later, his friends and colleagues erected a statue for him in Stellenbosch which became notorious for the amount of times it had to be moved. In 1943, a biography of Du Plessis by G.B.A. Gerdener was published by the Christian Student Association (CSA). In this biography the case against Du Plessis is not a main focus, but is only briefly addressed in the second-last chapter.

### 3.2.2. *The wagon of Uzzah: memory and metaphor*

A first episode of the Du Plessis case worth highlighting is a debate on the interpretation of 2 Samuel 6 that erupted in the pages of *Die Kerkbode*.<sup>257</sup> On 13 November 1929, the editor insinuated that those who try to hold the ark on the wagon will be punished by God through a divine intervention (Deist, 1986: 36). He argued that God is powerful and can take care of the purity of the church's teaching without the help of people (36). C.R.

<sup>255</sup> See Gerdener 1943: 224-226 for a short overview of the official processes.

<sup>256</sup> In April 1930, students also publicly showed their support for Du Plessis by an address presented to him signed by 95 students (see "Adres aan Prof. J. du Plessis", April 1930, DRC Archive, Stellenbosch).

<sup>257</sup> Ferdinand Deist (1986) starts his article on Du Plessis with this polemic. Here I mainly follow his version and reading of the debate.

Kotzé and D.R. Snyman<sup>258</sup>, respectively, provided an alternative interpretation of this text. Uzzah died because the ark – in accordance with a Philistine example – was loaded onto *a new wagon* (37). In transporting the ark, the clear divine instructions were not followed and this is what caused the death of Uzzah (37). The implied accusation in their reading is that Du Plessis had placed the teaching of the church on a new, heathen wagon – an act that could only lead to a disaster (37).

This ark-and-wagon metaphor underscores at one and the same time the steadfastness and vulnerability of a tradition and the community who is constituted by it. The ark is untouchable and unquestionable, but the wagon that carries it is not. The oxen may stumble and the ark may tumble. As is clear from the different interpretations of 2 Samuel 6 that were presented, how this tension between steadfastness and vulnerability had to be handled was a matter of dispute.

This dispute, and the metaphor on which it hinged, sheds light on the underlying logic that informed the way tradition was understood. It palpably portrays tradition as a fixed and secure entity that should be conveyed and transmitted in very specific ways. The goods of the tradition and how it is transmitted are once again detached from each other. In my opinion, this is an image of tradition that is related to the one presented in the sermon on 2 Timothy 1: 14 discussed in the introductory chapter – “bewaar het goede pand.” As discussed, “de goede pand” and “bewaar” constitute two aspects of tradition.

This metaphor was also present during the confessional debates of the Du Plessis case, as can be seen in an article by G.B.A. Gerdener. Pleading for some calmness and rationality amid emotional discussions about the possibility of revising the Formulae (see 3.3.2.), Gerdener emphasises the need to treat “die kosbare pand van die oorgelewerde belydenis”<sup>259</sup> with the necessary respect (Gerdener, 1931: 204).

As we will see in the next chapter, “foundation” was another prominent metaphor used to understand the Formulae. The Confessions were often referred to as “vaste fondamente.” Different metaphors create different understandings and arguments as can be seen in this example from 1930. W.A. Joubert uses foundations as a metaphor to

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<sup>258</sup> D.R. Snyman was one of Du Plessis’ main opponents (Olivier 1990: 253-254). In explaining Snyman’s theological formation, Olivier mentions the American struggle against liberalism as something that had a significant impact on him. Olivier writes of Snyman returning from his time in Princeton: “Met hierdie ervaring en oortuiging het hy in 1923 as jong teoloog teruggekom na sy vaderland. Hy was gereed om die kerk te help stry teen liberaal gesindes wat besig was om oral in die wêreld die kerk op sleeptou te neem. Hulle moes aan die kaak gestel en gestuit word” (254).

<sup>259</sup> “the precious promise of the inherited confession”

address accusations of fundamentalism: “Is niet elke predikant die de plechtige verklaring en belofte in art. 158 vervat ondertekend heeft, ipso facto, een fundamentalist? Zijn onze belijdenisschriften dan niet het fundament der leer onze Kerk?” (Joubert quoted in Olivier, 1990: 182). By this I do not imply that fundamentalism in the DRC originated with these metaphors, but rather that metaphors are malleable and impact our understanding.<sup>260</sup>

J.C. du Plessis’ metaphor for tradition equally allowed him to consider certain ideas. He likened the Confessions to a chair inherited from one’s father:

[D]is ook waar dat aan die ander kant eerbied en liefde vir daardie kostelike erfstukke van die Kerk die gedagte nie kan verdra dat ’n Belydenis, wat die dierbaarste en heiligste waarhede in sy skoot dra, sal hersien word [nie]. Maar tog hoe ek ook al mag teenhou dat aan my ou vader se stoel, wat vir my so ’n kostelike erfstuk is en waarop ek so graag sit, nie sal gewerk word nie, die tyd breek tog eindelik aan wanneer die hand van reparasie daaraan moet geslaan word. So is dit ook met die erfstuk van ons Belydenisskrifte (Du Plessis, 1931a: 233).<sup>261</sup>

Deist’s summary of the quarrel about Uzzah’s wagon may be accurate when he asks: “What was happening? Did a part of the church attempt to provide unsolicited human support to church doctrine, or was another part busy loading the ‘ark’ on a new wagon?” (Deist, 1986: 37). However, our analysis of the different sense-making strategies of the time will show that the distinctions are not that straightforward and that it is also not easy to divide the opinion-makers into definite and opposing camps. As argued above, the split between the goods of tradition and its transmittance leads to a tension that is not easily resolved. Different metaphors further complicate this matter.

### 3.2.3. *A struggle repeated?*

When the controversy around Du Plessis and his theological position broke out, it was almost immediately paralleled to the Liberal Struggle of the 1860s. *Die Ou Paaie*, a conservative theological journal who was purposely established in 1926 to contest the

<sup>260</sup> The fundamentalist influence in the DRC is traced back to Princeton Seminary through the students who did postgraduate studies there. See Brümmer 2013: 231.

<sup>261</sup> It is also true that, on the other hand, reverence and love for those precious heirlooms of the Church cannot stand the thought that a Confession, which cherishes the dearest and holiest truths, will be revised. But still, however I might try to delay work on my father’s old chair, which is such a precious heirloom to me and on which I enjoy sitting so much, the time for the hand of reparation to intervene will come. It is the same with the heirloom of our Confessions.



“deviating views” of *Het Zoeklicht*, persistently pointed out and discussed these similarities. In addition to the parallels it drew, these examples also affirm the one-dimensional way the DRC remembered the Liberal Struggle. This includes the memory of Hofmeyr and Murray as the champions of the Liberal Struggle.<sup>262</sup>

A series of articles in *Die Ou Paaie* of February 1928 shows how direct these comparisons were. An article titled “Die dwaling wat ons kerk in die laaste eeu bedreig het”<sup>263</sup> (OP, 1928a: 123-129) sings the praises of Prof. N.J. Hofmeyr for the way in which his prophetic insight aided the struggle against liberalism. In essence, the article is a republication of extracts from Hofmeyr’s “Vier Leerreden tegen de Hedendaagse Dwaling”<sup>264</sup> (1868).<sup>265</sup> The copy of the book that the author used is described as old and dusty and damaged by moths and likened to Hofmeyr who had been dead for a number of years already (OP, 1928a: 123). The content of the book, on the contrary, is said to be as clear and relevant as decades ago (123).<sup>266</sup> The relevance of Hofmeyr’s work and character for the present day is outlined:

Die laaste eeu het die opkoms van ’n gevaarlike dwaling in ons Kerk gesien ... Sy woorde getuig nie alleen van ’n skerpsinnige profetiese insig in die ontsettende gevaar wat die Kerk bedreig het nie, maar van ’n heilige vuur en ywer vir die handhawing van die eer van Kristus, die volle gesag van Godswoord, die kerklike tug ...<sup>267</sup> (OP, 1928a: 123-124).

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<sup>262</sup> See OP 1930: 271-272 under the heading “Prof. N.J. Hofmeyr en die Liberale Stryd”: “Niemand het ’n groter deel geneem in die stryd teen die Liberalisme as Prof. Hofmeyr en Dr Andrew Murray nie. Daar sit vuur in die woorde van hierdie Godsmanne... [H]ierdie manne blaak van ywer. As ’n mens sig rekenskap van hierdie ywer wil gee, dan is daar maar een antwoord, naamlik: hulle was hulle bewus van die gevaar wat die Kerk ten stryde geroep het vir die handhawing van haar leer met ’n profeet se vuur en ’n ywer wat tot diepe nadenking stem, veral in hierdie tyd wanneer die Kerk haar andermaal tot die stryd aangegord het teen die afwykende beskouings soos voorgestaan in *Het Zoeklicht*. Wat die saak nou, indien moontlik, nog ernstiger maak is die feit dat in die Liberale Stryd die Kerk opgetree het teen betreklik jong predikante, wat afwykende beskouings voorgestaan het, terwyl nou aan die orde is die leer van ’n Hoogleraar, wat in die Kweekskool is, en deelneem aan die opleiding van onse predikante” (271-272).

<sup>263</sup> “The digression that threatened our church for the last century”

<sup>264</sup> “Four teachings against the contemporary digression”

<sup>265</sup> In February 1930, *Die Ou Paaie* also published excerpts from Hofmeyr’s “De Kerk en de Rechtbank” – the publication that eventually included the writings of Wachter published in the *Kerkbode* that were discussed in the previous chapter. See OP 1930d: 271-273.

<sup>266</sup> “Voor ons lê ’n boekie wat die tekens van sy ouderdom dra. Hy is oortrek met stofvlekke, en orals in die rante is daar diep gate soos die motte dit verteer het... Die uiterlike toestand van die boekie is vir ons ’n sinnebeeld van die voortreflike skrywer, wat baie jare reeds die prooi van die graf met sy bederf geword het. Maar dit is slegs een sy van die saak. Die uiterlike toestand van die boekie doen gelukkig nie die minste afbreuk aan sy boodskap nie. Elke letter is duidelik en bring ’n helder boodskap. So met die ontslape Professor van ons Kweekskool...” (OP, 1928a: 123-124).

<sup>267</sup> The last century saw the emergence of a dangerous digression in our Church ... His words are not only characteristic of an astute prophetic insight into the incredible danger threatening the Church, but also of

In the very next article, titled “De Onderzoeker” (OP, 1928b: 130), the comparison continues. The journal established by Du Plessis, *Het Zoeklicht*, is likened to the so-called liberal journal of the 1860s, *De Onderzoeker*: “like in the days of *De Onderzoeker* we are now confronted with *Het Zoeklicht*, albeit in a slightly alternated form. It still comes with the same dangers ...” (130).

Then, under the heading “Die dwaling wat ons kerk in hierdie eeu bedreig”<sup>268</sup> (OP, 1928c: 130-136), D.R. Snyman gives his judgement of the Liberal Struggle and his interpretation of the current theological climate:

Ons het so ewe geluister na die waarskuwende stem van die verlede teen ’n gevaar wat toe gedreig het. Was dit ’n gevaar, en was dit goed om daardie gevaar te beveg? Prof. Hofmeyr aan wie se voete baie van ons predikante die eer gehad het om te sit, was oortuig dat dit ’n gevaar was (130).<sup>269</sup>

By quoting from a letter written to Hofmeyr in 1907, at the time of his retirement, by A.I. Steytler and D.S. Botha on behalf of the Synod, Snyman once again emphasises the heroic status Hofmeyr had in the eyes of the DRC. He also makes it clear that all liberal elements were ousted from the church:

Aan u en de nooit te vergeten Prof. John Murray, hebben wy het naast God te danken dat de Gereformeerde leer gehandhaaf en in stand gebleven is onder ons, en dat het Modernisme dat eens dreigde onze kerk binnen te treden en te verwoesten is afgeweerd, en zoover wy weten, thans geen enkel aanhanger onder onze leeraren telt<sup>270</sup> (OP, 1928c: 130).

Snyman also shows how a more recent Synod (of 1924) had continued to honour this legacy:

En dit is welbekend hoe dat die Synode van 1924 daardie bestryding van en oorwinning oor die Liberale Party geroem en by wyse van ’n referaat opgestel

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a sacred fire and zeal for maintaining the honour of Christ, the full authority of God’s Word, the churchly discipline ...

<sup>268</sup> “The digression that threatened our church for the last century”

<sup>269</sup> We listened without much care to the warning voice from the past against a danger that loomed then. Was it a threat, and was it good to fight that threat? Prof. Hofmeyr, at whose feet many of our ministers had the honour to sit, was convinced that it was a threat.

<sup>270</sup> To you and the never-to-be-forgotten Prof. John Murray, we have God to thank that the Reformed doctrine was maintained and remained in place under us, and that the Modernism that once threatened to enter and to ruin our church was fended off, and, as far as we know, currently have no support under our ministers.

deur die onlangs ontslape ds D.J. Pienaar. Hier is sy oordeel: 'Het einde of resultaat van de stryd was dus dat het moderne ongeloof in onze kerk geen permanente voet heeft gekregen, en de leer onzer vaders, gegrond op Gods Woord, in hare zuiverheid is gehandhaafd geworden. Dat wy toch maar in dankbare herinnering houden de mannen die daarvoor gestreden, en van de zyde der lichtzinnige wereld smaad geleden hebben.' Met hierdie uitspraak het die laaste Sinode ingestem. So het die nageslag geoordeel oor die werk van die voorgeslag<sup>271</sup> (130-131).

Then Snyman makes it clear that the DRC is faced by precisely the same challenge:

'n Pertinente vraag is: Is die standpunt van *Het Zoeklicht* toegedaan is 'n afwykende of gevaarlike of nie? ... Vir ons is dit 'n uitgemaakte saak dat die rigting wat *Het Zoeklicht* voorstaan 'n ontsettende gevaar vir ons is. Die stryd nou loop prinsipiële oor dieselfde dinge wat beroering in die kerk gebring het gedurende die laaste eeu ... Wat gaan die Kerk doen? Gaan ons nou heul met 'n kwaad wat reeds vroeër gedreig het om ons kerk te verwoes? Etlike kerklike vergaderings het die rigting van *Het Zoeklicht* veroordeel as gevaarlik<sup>272</sup> (OP, 1928c: 131).

The article ends with a passionate plea for the church to take up its responsibility:

Ons swyg nog voorlopig omtrent die ernstige verpligting wat ons as kerk het teenoor ons byna 320000 gemeentelede. Ons het dure verpligtinge teenoor hulle, en teenoor onself.

Is dit nie hoog, hoog tyd dat hieraan 'n einde gemaak word nie? Gaan ons langer met vuur speel? Gaan ons lig dink oor die krag en invloed van ons kerk in die verlede deur Gods genade uitgeoefen het? Gaan ons haar blootstel aan 'n toenemende beroering wat tot in lengte van dae 'n sure nasmaak sal en moet hê? 'Wee diegene deur wie die ergernisse kom!'<sup>273</sup> (136).

<sup>271</sup> And it is well-known how the Synod of 1924 boasted about that suppression of and victory over the Liberal Party by means of a paper compiled by the recently departed rev D.J. Pienaar. Here is his judgement: 'The conclusion or result of the struggle was therefore that the modern disbelief in our church had gained no permanent footing, and the doctrine of our father, based on God's Word, in her purity was maintained. We should still keep in grateful memory the men who fought for it, and that we only suffered reproach from the frivolous world.' The last Synod agreed with this statement. In this way, the progeny judged the work of the ancestors.

<sup>272</sup> A pertinent question is: Is the position to which *Het Zoeklicht* is devoted a deviating or dangerous position or not? ... For us it is a foregone fact that the direction for which *Het Zoeklicht* stands is a great danger to us. The struggle now is principally about the same things that brought turmoil in the church during the last century ... What are the church going to do? Are we going to collude with an evil that earlier already threatened to destroy our church? Various churchly meetings denounced the direction of *Het Zoeklicht* as dangerous.

<sup>273</sup> For the time being, we remain silent about the serious obligation that we as church have toward our 320000 parishioners. We have costly obligations toward them, and toward ourselves.

These examples show the direct comparison that was made between the Du Plessis case and the Liberal Struggle. Moreover, depicting the Du Plessis case as a repetition of an earlier battle (that was believed to have been won) served as both a signpost and a source of courage in the current battle.

### 3.2.4. *A battle already won?*

The comparisons between the two events continued throughout the course of the Du Plessis case. The striking thing about them is the way in which they depict the present conflict as a question or difficulty to which the church has a ready-made and time-tested solution. Any dragging, hesitation or even earnest inquiry on the matter is portrayed as entirely unnecessary and even dangerous.

How the case at hand was depicted as a supposedly straightforward one, is well demonstrated by an article from 1928 titled “Die Du Plessis Saak: van waar die beroering in ons Kerk?” (OP, 1928d: 236-238). In the article four authors set out “met diepe erns en alle beskeidenheid”<sup>274</sup> (236) to name “the grounds on which the general turmoil” present in the church is based. The evidence is sketched as speaking for itself by the authors’ declaration that what they present is “not very complicated” and that they therefore withhold themselves from making any comments on the supposed forthright evidence.

They begin by mentioning that Du Plessis had already promoted historical criticism and “other sciences” in 1912. However, both Andrew Murray and J.I. Marais are said to have immediately responded negatively to this. Now that Du Plessis has started with his “fruitless movement” anew, they bemoan, Murray and Marais are not there to raise their voices in warning. It is therefore because of the absence of figures like Murray and Marais, and possibly on their behalf and in loyalty to them, we can add, that the authors take it upon themselves to expose the real nature of Du Plessis’ project.

They then set out to give an outline of “only a few” of Du Plessis’ “modern” views against the teaching of the church so that readers can clearly see whether the two fit together or not (237). They literally present extracts from the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Bible in one column and extract from *Het Zoeklicht* in another in a

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Is it not high, high time that an end should be put to this? Are we going to play with fire some more? Are we going to undervalue in our thinking the power and influence exercised by our church in the past? Are we going to expose her to an increasing turmoil that will have a sour aftertaste until the end of days? ‘Woe those through whom these evils come!

<sup>274</sup> “with deep concern and complete humility”

fashion that mimics a game of “spot the differences.” These columns are provided with the following headings: “Die leer van ons Kerk wat ook Prof. du Plessis onderteken het, toe hy predikant geword het” and “Die leer wat Prof. Du Plessis NOU verkondig”<sup>275</sup> (237).

Although the case should not be overstated, the announced simplicity of what the authors set out to do (they themselves call it “minder ingewikkelde punte”<sup>276</sup>), together with the way in which the matter is simplified by their columned outline, may be read as an argument that what is at hand is all very easy to evaluate. Moreover, citing Marais and Murray is representative of a habit in this period. Time and again, the case of Du Plessis would be compared to the conflict in the church during the 1860s, and the authoritative voices who denounced the “unruly” crowd of the past cited in denunciation of Du Plessis. This strategy seemed to have served both as a way to add weight to one’s position and a way through which tribute could be paid to the past and gratitude expressed to predecessors. The past is simultaneously instrumentalised as a legitimisation of the present, and the present situation used as a way to honour the past.

Even though many of the examples listed so far do not focus on the Heidelberg Catechism or the Formulae in particular, it is evident that the manner in which the DRC upheld and maintained its Confessions at the time of the Liberal struggle is depicted as the exemplary action that should be repeated. The Formulae, one can argue, are therefore remembered as the ecclesial instrument that can easily and definitively deal with theological conflict like the Du Plessis case.

This is the point emphasised by a 1930 article entitled “Die stryd van onse kerk teen die Liberalisme. ’n Hartdeursoekende dokument uit die stryd van ons Kerk teen die Liberalisme”<sup>277</sup> (OP, 1930a: 268-271). It refers to and provides a selective translation of the 1864 pamphlet *No Liberalism*:<sup>278</sup>

Ook sal blyk ... hoe helder ons Kerk die diepingrypende beginsels wat op die spel was in die Liberale stryd, en die gevaar wat die Kerk bedreig het, ingesien het, en hoe sy haar sterk gemaak het om die Belydenis van die Kerk teen enige

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<sup>275</sup> “The doctrine of our Church, which Prof. du Plessis also signed when he became a minister” and “The doctrine which Prof. Du Plessis proclaims NOW”

<sup>276</sup> “less complicated points”

<sup>277</sup> “The struggle of our church against the Liberalism. A soul-searching document from the struggle of our Church against the Liberalism”

<sup>278</sup> This is a pamphlet by “Member of the Synod” on the court case of J.J. Kotzé, 1862-1863.

koste te handhaaf. Treffend is die ooreenkoms tussen die Liberale stryd en die stryd nou<sup>279</sup> (268).

These accounts of the Liberal Struggle rarely mention the fact that, when the matter was referred to the High Court, the court ruled in favour of Kotzé and Burgers. The victory that this represented to the liberals seems to have been forgotten. This suggests that, in the collective view of the DRC, justifications like those of Wachter and Evangeliedienaar prevailed. The actual *inability* of the Formulae to straightforwardly judge – let alone solve – theological conflict as intricate as that present in the Liberal Struggle and the Du Plessis case was dispelled from the DRC’s sense-making framework. Even reflections that do refer to the court case and its outcome affirm the DRC’s victory unambiguously. Moreover, the liberal party is depicted as sly aggressors attacking the church:

Die jare 1862-1870 was donker dae vir onse Kerk gewees. Sy was voor die Regbank gesleep deur manne wat hulle bewus was dat hulle nie die leer van die Kerk glo nie, en dat hulle troubreuk teenoor die Kerk gepleeg het, en besig was om haar Belydenisskrifte te ondermyn, maar wat by die Regbank voordeeltjies gaan soek het op grond van tegniese puntjies. Maar God die Here het nie geslaap nie. ‘De Onderzoeker’, die blad van die liberales het onder gegaan, en die hand van die Here was teen die verbreiders van die ongeloof. Temidde van die stryd het die Here die Kerk met seën besoek: sondaars het tot bekering gekom, en die gelowige volk van God was opgebou. Die liberalisme was verwoes; die vuur van die ongeloof het uitgebrand, maar voor dat die vlamme geblus was, het dit die Kerk stryd, sware stryd, aanhoudende stryd, gekos, – ja selfs verguising voor die aardse Regbank<sup>280</sup> (OP, 1930b: 275).

Another mnemonic association with the Formulae that was carried over from the 1860s to the 1930s is that of struggle. In February 1930, *Die Ou Paaie* published an article with the title “Die seënende hand van God op die strydende kerk”<sup>281</sup> (OP, 1930c: 273-275). It

<sup>279</sup> Will also seem ... how clearly our Church perceived the deeply profound principles that were at stake in the Liberal struggle, and the danger that threatened the Church, and how she made herself strong to maintain the Confession of the Church at all costs. Striking is the resemblance between the Liberal struggle and the struggle now.

<sup>280</sup> Our Church experienced dark days during 1862-1870. She was also dragged to the Court by men who knew that they did not believe in the doctrine of the Church, and that they betrayed the Church, and were busy undermining her Confessions, but sought little advantages from the Court on grounds of little technical points. But the Lord God did not sleep. ‘De Onderzoeker’, the paper of the liberals, went under, and the hand of the Lord was against the spreaders of the disbelief. Amid the struggle, the Lord blessed the Church: sinners repented, and the faithful people of God were raised up. The liberalism was destroyed; the fire of the disbelief has burnt out, but before the flames were extinguished, it cost the Church struggle, heavy struggle, continuous struggle – yes, even vilification before the earthly Court.

<sup>281</sup> “The blessing hand of God over the struggling church”

quotes Rev J.H. Neethling – who is remembered as participating in the Liberal Struggle “met onvermoeide ywer”<sup>282</sup> (273) – who supposedly made the following remark at the time: ““Die Kristendom maak nie van ’n mens ’n pap-broek nie.””<sup>283</sup> The author commented on this in a tone of battle and destruction:

Dis reguit en waar gesê. Vir reg, en teen onreg, moet daar altyd gestry word ... Die genade-verbond is in die lewe geroep met ’n strydkreet en ’n strydverklaring. Sê Genesis 3: 15, die moederbelofte: ‘Ik zal vyandschap zetten tussen u en tussen deze vrouw, en tussen uw zaad en haar zaas; datzelve zal u den kop vermorzelen, en gy zult het de verzenen vermorzelen.’ Vier dinge lê in hierdie teks opgesluit: 1) Daar is ’n stryd. 2) Dit is ’n voortgesette stryd. 3) Dit is ’n stryd wat uitloop op vernietiging van enigiets wat nie bevorderlik is vir die koninkryk van God. 4) Dit is God wat die stryd verklaar, voortset en volstry ... Waar die Kerk van die Here getrou gebly het aan die vermaning van haar Heiliand om te stry vir die geloof wat eenmaal aan die heiliges oorgelewer is, het sy telkens Sy goedkeuring en Sy seën weggedra<sup>284</sup> (OP, 1930c: 273-274).

It was soon clear that the Du Plessis case, too, would become a watershed in the memory of the DRC. In April 1930, E.E. van Rooyen solemnly declared:

Die jaar 1930 sal in die geskiedenis van die NG Kerk van die Kaap Provinsie altyd geld as ’n jaar van meer as gewone betekenis ... Die spreuk ‘De mensch wikt maar God beschikt’, geld ook hier<sup>285</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1930: 391).

Given the ways in which the Liberal Struggle as an earlier watershed influenced the interpretation of the Du Plessis case, the combination of the two events can be said to have formed an important foundation for DRC identity.<sup>286</sup> They came to represent two

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<sup>282</sup> “with untiring efforts”

<sup>283</sup> ““The Christendom does not make one a coward””

<sup>284</sup> It was said outright and true. There should always be battled for justice, and against injustice ... The Covenant of Grace was founded with a battle cry and declaration of battle. Say Genesis 3: 15, the mother’s promise: ‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’ Four things are locked up in this text: 1) There is a struggle. 2) It is a continuous struggle. 3) It is a struggle that results in destruction of anything that is not conducive to the kingdom of God. 4) It is God who declares, continues and confronts the struggle ... Where the church of the Lord remained loyal to warning of her Saviour to fight for the faith that was once delivered to the saints, she constantly enjoyed His approval and His blessings.

<sup>285</sup> The year 1930 will always be a year with more than average meaning in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape Province ... The expression ‘Man proposes, but God disposes’ also applies here.

<sup>286</sup> The renowned Stellenbosch philosopher, Hennie Rossouw, gave an insightful interpretation of the Du Plessis case during a gathering of the Degenaar discussion group on 2 November 2000. He argues that this



grave and critical moments in which the DRC bravely and decisively withstood an onslaught, in the name of true Protestantism and loyalty to its heritage.

The mnemonic trajectory described up to this point was of course only one part of the argumentation occurring at the time of the Du Plessis case. Du Plessis also had many supporters. In the same article in which Van Rooyen triumphantly announces the end of the Du Plessis case, he responds to the “propaganda” of some of Du Plessis’ supporters. They depicted him as a pioneer “wat deur die tyd geregverdig en deur die nageslag met monumente vereer sal word”<sup>287</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1930: 393). Van Rooyen, however, rejects the idea that Du Plessis will be remembered in this way:

Dit is moeilik om met sekerheid te sê wat die nageslag gaan doen, maar as hulle monumente gaan oprig sal dit seker nie op grond van die feit wees dat die professor baanbrekende gedagtes verkondig het nie, want baanbrekend in die sin van wat nuut, oorspronklik is en werklik op pote staan, het hy tot nog toe in verband met die stryd geen enkele gedagte uitgespreek nie. Andere weer het die posisie van die professor by die van Luther en Kristus voor die Joodse raad vergelyk. Hiervan wil ons net sê dat ’n mens werklik min sin vir proporsie moet hê om sulke wilde vergelykings te maak<sup>288</sup> (393-394).

Du Plessis, like the liberals of the 1860s, based his position on nothing but true Protestantism. Moreover, in the face of many contemporary challenges, Du Plessis held that Reformed theology presented the best possible position from which to address it.<sup>289</sup>

The one-dimensional memory of the Liberal Struggle that featured in the Du Plessis case can be said to have served two purposes: firstly, it almost instantaneously defined the event as a “struggle” that had all the weight given to the Liberal Struggle; secondly, it pre-empted the outcome or solution of the conflict.

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controversy became the point of crystallisation for differences in the DRC that had long been present. Its outcome, Rossouw argues, “had a far-reaching effect on the intellectual culture and spiritual ethos of the DRC, and also on the broader Afrikaans-speaking community” (Rossouw, 2000: 5). A “controlled intellectual openness” and an ecclesial culture of accommodation for intra-church differences, he argues, were replaced by an antithetical spirit of “introverted closedness” and “belligerent exclusivism” (14).

<sup>287</sup> “which will be justified through time and be honoured with monuments by the progeny”

<sup>288</sup> It is difficult to say with certainty what the progeny will do, but if they are going to erect monuments, it will probably not be on the grounds that the professor preached pioneering thoughts, because pioneering in the sense of what is new, original and really stand on their own feet, he has not uttered a single thought regarding the struggle. Others again compared the position of the professor to that of Luther and Christ before the Jewish Council. About this, we only want to say that one must have little sense of proportion to make such wild comparisons.

<sup>289</sup> See Du Plessis 1932a: 292-298.



### 3.2.5. *Tug of war: the memory of Andrew Murray*

Given the prominent place that memories of an earlier struggle had in the Du Plessis case, it comes as no surprise that conflicting memories of a figure like Andrew Murray arose. Memories of Murray were presented time and again to strengthen some or other position within the current dispute. It is therefore not insignificant that a statue of Murray was erected at the Groote Kerk (the oldest DRC building in South Africa) at the time of the Du Plessis case.

A striking counter-example to the way in which Murray was mainly presented as a champion for the orthodox cause can be found in *Het Zoeklicht* of October 1932 under the heading “Dr. Andrew Murray van Onregsinnigheid betig”<sup>290</sup> (Du Plessis, 1932b: 306-312). It features an article by S.J. du Toit in *Die Patriot* of 1893 in which Murray is fiercely accused of being “[d]ie grootste vyand van ons nasionaliteit en ondermyner van ons Gereformeerde leer”<sup>291</sup> (306). The lengthy article is published with very little comment. Du Plessis simply introduces the article with the statement: “Die geskiedenis van die verlede kan dikwels vir verstandige mense baie lig laat opgaan oor die beleid wat die toekoms eis”<sup>292</sup> (306). He then mentions that its author, S.J. du Toit was known as a bold adversary of the DRC, but nevertheless remained a member of it until his death (306). Furthermore, Du Plessis mentions the absence of any reference to this incident in the biography of S.J. du Toit written by his son, J.D. du Toit, and reminds his readers that the younger Du Toit served as a witness for the moderation in the recent court case (306). At the end of the article, Du Plessis again writes a few short lines:

Dog Dr. Murray het geen notisie geneem van die geskryf van Ds. S.J. du Toit nie, en die NG Kerk het, deur Ds. M. as Moderator te herkies, bewys dat hy niks glo van die aantygings van Ds. Du T. nie<sup>293</sup> (312).

In the next issue (November 1932), this article is followed by another lengthy republication – this time the 1880 Synod’s judgement of *Die Patriot*, as published in pamphlet form in 1886 (Du Plessis, 1932c: 342-352). This time Du Plessis’ comments on it are even fewer, and one can only assume that he once again draws subtle parallels between these events and his own situation. His indirect comparison would then be between *Die Ou Paaie* and *Die Patriot*, perhaps suggesting that, in continuity with DRC

<sup>290</sup> “Dr. Andrew Murray reprimanded for Unorthodoxy”

<sup>291</sup> “the biggest enemy to our nationality and quisling to our Reformed doctrine”

<sup>292</sup> “The history of the past can often shed a lot of light on the policy required by the future.”

<sup>293</sup> Though Dr. Murray did not take notice of Rev. S.J. du Toit’s writing, and the Dutch Reformed Church, by re-electing Rev. M. as Moderator, proved that he did not believe any of the accusations by Rev. Du T.

tradition, a condemnation of *Die Ou Paaie* is what is needed, and not the continued suspicion brought in against *Het Zoeklicht*.

Despite its fierceness, Du Plessis published this article in full. However, it is clear that his intention was not to depict Murray as a villain and heretic by drawing on a historical source, but rather to compare his own position with that of Murray. Du Plessis thus also claimed Murray for his cause, and we can perhaps go as far as to say that he, too, was influenced by the homogeneous memory of the Liberal Struggle. Nash (1997: 55-65) holds that Du Plessis wrote the “authoritative account of the struggle between DRC orthodoxy and theological liberalism in the 1860s; an account wholly sympathetic to the orthodox party which was to mobilise itself against him” (Nash, 1997: 61).<sup>294</sup>

Du Plessis’ own attempts to show that his position is coherent with Murray’s became more direct after he was accused by E.J.H Smith in a letter to *Het Zoeklicht* of a skew depiction of Murray’s position. Smith wrote:

U meen blykbaar dat die geskiedkundige lig kan toon dat ’n regsinnige man tog soms van onregsinnigheid kan betig word soos in die geval van Dr. A. Murray, en soos u natuurlik meen dat nou met u die geval is, en dat u dus in goeie geselskap verkeer ondanks alle beskuldigings van ander kante. By die ondersoek insake die geselskapkwessie moet ek u daaraan herinner dat Dr. A. Murray in sy tyd meer en groter teenstanders gehad het as ’n S.J. du Toit, want hy kon dit wel bekostig om die aanval van laasgenoemde te ignoreer, dog die aanvalle van die andere (die liberaliste van die vorige eeu) het hom luidkeels laat antwoord en getuig. Daarom meen ek dat dit ’n baie juister geskiedkundige lig op die huidige posisie en ’die beleid wat die toekoms eis’ sal laat val as ons nie alleen let het nie, maar veral waar hy *gepraat* het, op die gevalle waar Dr. A. Murray *geswyg* het ten einde te sien of sy praat en u praat ooreenkom<sup>295</sup> (Smith, 1932: 378).

Smith then proceeds by looking into “what [Du Plessis] says, what the liberals said, and what Dr. A Murray testified (*getuig het*)” (378). He then gives three examples through

<sup>294</sup> See Du Plessis’ biography of Andrew Murray (1920), *Het leven van Andrew Murray*.

<sup>295</sup> You apparently imply that this historical light can show that a rational man can sometimes be reprimanded for absurdity as in the case of Dr. A. Murray, and as you imply is now the case with you, and that you are therefore in good company despite all the accusations from other directions. About the investigation regarding the company issue, I should remind you that Dr. A. Murray in his time had more and bigger opponents than a S.J. du Toit, because he could in fact afford to ignore the attack of the latter, still the attacks by the others (the liberalists of the previous century) had him replying and testifying at the top of his voice. Therefore, I imply that it sheds a much more accurate historical light on the current position and ‘the policy required by the future’ if we do not note only, but especially where he talked, in the cases where Dr. A. Murray remained silent to see if his talk and your talk agree.

which he purports that Du Plessis cannot claim to “find himself in the company of Murray” (378-380).

Du Plessis responded to Smith’s allegations in detail, accusing him of quoting Murray out of context. Although Du Plessis also draws on other scholars and other arguments than merely Murray to prove his consistency with Reformed teaching, he nevertheless ends his response by refuting the claim that Murray opposed or would have opposed him (282).

Du Plessis, for example, points out that Murray congratulated him with his appointment at the Seminary and went through much trouble to attend his inauguration. He also mentions that he was personally appointed by Murray to write his biography, and, furthermore, refers to cooperation between them in 1912. This “gedagtewisseling”<sup>296</sup> between Du Plessis and Murray took place in *Die Kerkbode*, and addressed the topic “Prediking naar de behoefte des tijds.”<sup>297</sup> Du Plessis pleaded

... dat in die kerklike prediking daar ‘op duidelike en verstaanbare manier aangetoon word op watter hegte en onwrikbare grondslae die gebou van die Christendom gefundeer staan; waarin besware teen Bybelse uitsprake en Christelike leerstellinge weggeneem word; waarin die ooreenstemming van die Christendom met die hedendaagse wetenskap aangetoon word, en dergelike meer’<sup>298</sup> (Du Plessis quoted in Brümmer, 2013: 224).

Brümmer shows that Murray did not wholeheartedly agree with Du Plessis on this matter, but rather warned that such sermons would confuse people and would be a medium “om die saad van twyfel te versprei en die geloof aan Gods Woord te ondermyn”<sup>299</sup> (Murray quoted in Brümmer, 225). Elsewhere, however, Brümmer shows that Du Plessis and Murray held to the same understanding of the Holy Scripture, and that Du Plessis defended the same position that Murray defended against the liberals (Brümmer, 247).<sup>300</sup>

These examples show the extent to which Murray was indeed seen as the gatekeeper of

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<sup>296</sup> “exchange of ideas”

<sup>297</sup> “Preaching to the needs of the time” – Parts of this cooperation were republished in the same issue of *Het Zoeklicht*. See Du Plessis 1932d: 375-377.

<sup>298</sup> ... that in the churchly preaching ‘it is indicated in a clear and understandable manner on which firm and unshakeable foundations the building of Christianity is founded; in which objections against Biblical statements and Christian doctrines are removed; in which the agreement of Christianity with the contemporary sciences is indicated, and so forth’.

<sup>299</sup> “to spread the seed of doubt and undermine the belief in God’s Word”

<sup>300</sup> Brümmer indeed goes to lengths to point out the similarities between Murray and Du Plessis, and also between Du Plessis and Hofmeyr. See Brümmer 2013: 260-264).

Reformed Orthodoxy in the DRC. Du Plessis' efforts to show his continuity with Murray suggest that he too bought into this idea.<sup>301</sup> The different instances of drawing parallels between these two battles also reveal another trend in DRC sense-making. Many of the claims and counterclaims to the true Protestant identity during the Du Plessis case mirror a pattern that we have already pointed out in the Liberal Struggle: opposing groups find themselves equally attached to a shared identity and draw on the same historical sources to legitimate their identity. Whereas in the Liberal Struggle continuity with the Reformation and the Synod of Dordt seemed to have been the historical anchors, the Du Plessis case saw the Liberal Struggle itself being made into a historical pillar of DRC identity. As has been pointed out, these anchors found particular embodiment in the figures of N.J. Hofmeyr and Andrew Murray. In addition, Du Plessis himself worked to keep this continuity intact.

### 3.3. Preservation or transformation

It is easy and tempting to think of Du Plessis' opponents as rigid confessionalists, and the aftermath of the Du Plessis case is indeed generally and persuasively typified as a period of neo-Calvinist confessionalism.<sup>302</sup> But who or what exactly is a rigid confessionalist? Understandably, those accused of being slavish subscribers to fixed ideas were not comfortable with being depicted in that way. Therefore, we find a professed openness in some of their arguments. Du Plessis, in turn, was also not prepared to completely break with the Formulae and one of his main arguments was that his views could be accommodated within the boundaries set by the Formulae (Olivier, 1990: 180). He propagated a Reformed theology that he regarded as the real "historical heritage of the DRC" (Deist, 1986: 42). For Du Plessis, according to Deist, that was a church who had no part or link to the Dutch *Afscheiding*, and therefore jealously had to secure that it remained in the mainstream of the Reformation (42).

Despite the often highly antithetical polemics that characterised this conflict, it is not easy to clearly differentiate the arguments made by opposing groups, or even come to grips with their various strategies of argumentation. On both sides, for example, we see a concern for, what may be termed, preservation and transformation – albeit that different emphases were placed on these inclinations. Underlying these inclinations, I want to point

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<sup>301</sup> Brümmer holds that in some regards Du Plessis was more of a follower of Hofmeyr than of Murray. Nevertheless, he affirms that Du Plessis' biography of Murray shows the spiritual affinity he had for Murray. See Brümmer 2013: 223-226.

<sup>302</sup> See Vosloo 2010: 275-288 and Vosloo 2012: 423-431.

out, are certain understandings of time and tradition, and what it means to endure in time or participate in a tradition. This is particularly evident in two areas of argumentation that was prominent at the time: 1) scientific progress and tradition and 2) confessional revision.

### 3.3.1. *Scientific progress and religious tradition*

We first look at arguments dealing with the tension between scientific progress and religious tradition.

The supposed ephemeral nature of scientific theories was presented as one of the big reasons why theological positions and traditions should not change in order to accommodate scientific findings. The editor's column of *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* of February 1933 serves as a good example of this position (GV, 1933e: 45-48).

In essence, the author sees no real opposition between faith and science. The DRC, the author states, does not view God's Word and science as being in a duel, because the same God reveals himself in nature and in Scripture (47). There is one condition, however: "it must be the *true* science, which consists of fixed, ordered and proven knowledge of things" (47). The author is strictly opposed to all those things that pretend to be science, but do not deserve the name and easily fade away (47). An example of this, for him, is the theory of evolution since "closer historical and archaeological studies revealed that the evolution theory is not able to explain the facts in a congruous way" (GV, 1933e: 47).

He therefore sees a juxtaposition between the true church and true believers, on the one hand, and scientific theories, on the other hand. The difference between the two, it seems, is the ability to endure through time: God's Word is said to be a "vaste fondament ... wat reeds die storme en aanvalle van vele eeue getrotseer het, en vandag nog pal staan"<sup>303</sup> (GV, 1933e: 47), and the Confessions are likewise grounded in the "everlasting Word of God" (47). Opposed to that are scientific theories, which are said to have a "wankelende bodem"<sup>304</sup> (47). It is characterised as something "wat kom en gaan, en eerlank weer van die toneel verdwyn, en wie se grootste aantreklikheid dikwels daarin geleë is, dat dit iets nuuts verkondig"<sup>305</sup> (47).<sup>306</sup> Endurance, stability and unchangeability

<sup>303</sup> "solid foundation ... which already braved the storms and attacks of many centuries, and still keeps standing today"

<sup>304</sup> "waving base"

<sup>305</sup> "which comes and goes, and soon disappears from the scene, and whose biggest appeal often lies in the fact that it preaches something new"

<sup>306</sup> The ephemeral nature of science being opposed to the eternal nature of God's Word and the Confessions

are thus provided as the conditions for truth.

The debunking of certain scientific theories played an important part in the rhetoric that was used against Du Plessis and the ideas associated with him (even after the formal closing of the case). In the *Gereformeerde Vaandel* of 1934, E.E. van Rooyen accuses *Die Soeklig* of propagating a “type of science” that does not measure up to the aforementioned standards of unchangeability. It is said to be an “indisputable fact” that the views which *Die Soeklig* sought to bring into the DRC are becoming less and less accepted in informed scientific circles and are outdated (GV, 1934a: 162). Accordingly, Van Rooyen argues, the concept “unscientific” is all the less associated with those holding onto the Bible and its views, and all the more with those who mindlessly accept the fluctuating theories of evolution (163). Van Rooyen, therefore, relies on *other* scientific theories in order to discredit the views of Du Plessis.

Endurance and unchangeability itself thus served as arguments. This is especially clear in the way Du Plessis’ person was vilified on the basis of his supposed unsteadiness. Van Rooyen (1934a: 310-312), referring to Du Plessis’ defence at the Presbytery meeting of 1929, sarcastically recalls Du Plessis’ “hooggeroemde ‘wetenskaplike’ standpunt”<sup>307</sup> as prone to “somersaulting” (310):

Dit pas so iemand seker nie om andere te betig dat hulle met die ‘onwetenskaplike gees’ vervul is nie ... Sulke onverkwikkelike bollemakiesieslanery pleit in elk geval nie vir ‘n begerenswaardige ‘wetenskaplike’ sekerheid en voet by stuk houdende manmoedigheid by die redakteur nie. En wat nou die drie professore betref, hulle het wel gegronde redes vir hulle sienswyse<sup>308</sup> (310).

On more than one occasion, Du Plessis accused the DRC and the Seminary of having an “unscientific spirit” (Du Plessis, 1933: 129-130), and at times it may seem that its representatives are not that bothered by it. To some, “scientific” as a label attained an “onaangename klank en bysmaak”<sup>309</sup> (Lategan, 1933: 94), as it came to be exclusively

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is also found in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* of 1863: “Ongelukkig, dat wat de wetenschap heden ontdekt, door de ontdekking van eenen volgenden dag wordt vernietigd. En intusschen blijft het waar: ‘Alle vleesch is gras, en alle goedertierenheid (en wel ook alle geleerdheid) des menschen als eene bloem des velds. Het gras verdort, de bloem valt af’ (P.H., 1863: 401). Opposed to science, there is the Confessions and God’s Word, and these are portrayed as (“God zij lof!”) eternal (“blijft tot in eeuwigheid!”) (401).

<sup>307</sup> “highly praised ‘scientific position’”

<sup>308</sup> It probably does not suit such a person to reprimand others about them being filled with the ‘unscientific spirit’ ... Such unsavoury somersaulting does not plead for an envious ‘scientific’ certainty and an adamant virility of the editor. And now regarding the three professors, they have well-founded reasons their view.

<sup>309</sup> “unpleasant sound and taint”

associated with the “nuwere beskouinge”<sup>310</sup> of Du Plessis and his supporters (94). It is argued, somewhat sarcastically, that “scientific” is an exclusive marker that only pertains to “him who thinks in the language and terms of the new orientation” and “learned” a term that only applies to him “who helps to promote the destructive work of that orientation” (94). In the light of these associations, the *Gereformeerde Vaandel* seems happy to dissociate itself from such science and states that its goal is not to put the “intellect, the reason of humanity, on the throne” (94) at the cost of God’s Word, “maar om die onsterflike siel te voed, op te bou en te versterk deur die waarheid Gods te ontvou en na ons insigte te verklaar”<sup>311</sup> (94).

However, in general, and especially after the Du Plessis case appeared to have been settled for good, efforts were made to refute the allegations that the DRC and the Seminary were opposed to science. In November 1934, Prof. D. Lategan argued, with specific reference to the complaints made about the Seminary at the Synod of 1932, that such allegations should be understood in the context of “the old objection of Modernism that was already brought in against the orthodox Reformed teaching in the middle of the 19th century” (Lategan, 1934: 332). “In the light of the past,” he continues, “we understand the complaint that the work currently done at the Seminary is of an unscientific nature” (332). But this is nothing to worry about, he holds, because such a complaint is merely exposing the viewpoint of the critic: “Dit werp lig op die betekenis van die wetenskaplikheid van die kritikus self”<sup>312</sup> (332).

This attempt to rectify the views about its own stance towards science is also seen at the closing down of *Die Soeklig*. In the editorial column of the *Gereformeerde Vaandel*, the position taken towards *Die Soeklig* is explicated. It is stated that the issue was never with the scientific nature of *Die Soeklig*, but the critique was against “the deviating views that it propagated” (GV, 1937a: 6). These views, it is argued, are seen as “beskouinge wat o.i. ingedruis het teen die uitsprake van Gods Woord en die Belydenisskrifte van die NG Kerk”<sup>313</sup> (6). An effort is made to assert that this does not mean that the *Gereformeerde Vaandel* is opposed to science: “Inteendeel, ons besef terdeë die noodsaaklikheid van voortgesette wetenskaplike ondersoek op teologiese gebied”<sup>314</sup> (6). Their position is therefore not that of “repristination” – “dat ons eenvoudig aan die oue vashou, omdat dit

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<sup>310</sup> “newer views”

<sup>311</sup> “but to feed, build and strengthen the immortal soul by unfolding the truth of God and explaining it by means of our insights”

<sup>312</sup> “It sheds light on the meaning of the scientific character of the critic themselves”

<sup>313</sup> “views that, in our opinion, went against the judgements of God’s Word and the Confessions of the DRC”

<sup>314</sup> “In contrast, we thoroughly grasp the necessity of continued scientific inquiry in the theological field.”



oud is, en ons verset teen wetenskaplike bestudering van teologiese vraagstukke”<sup>315</sup> (6) – but they do hold firmly that progress should always be based on the firm foundations of God’s Word and the Confessions of the church (6).

However, if this professed openness to progress is placed alongside the declaration signed by Van Rooyen, Malan and Lategan at the time of the *Gereformeerde Vaandel*’s establishment in 1933, it is clear that they had very definite ideas of what could be said to be aligned with God’s Word and the Formulae.<sup>316</sup>

Du Plessis fiercely reacted to this declaration. He points out, for example, that the authorship of the Pentateuch and the theory of evolution are not faith-related matters, but purely scientific subjects:

[S]elfs die Belydenisse bind ons nie, en kan ons nie bind nie, om op gesag aan te neem, wat op suiwer wetenskaplike manier bewys of ontsenu word. Wetenskaplike kwessies kan nie deur ’n beroep op gesag besleg word nie ... Dus, die outeurskap van die Pentateug het niks te doen met ons saligmakende geloof nie; dit is ’n saak van historiese en literariese kennis ... Dieselfde geld van die ewolusieleer ... Om hierdie leer te bestry, nie deur die aanvoering van wetenskaplike argumente nie, maar deur ’n beroep op die Kerk en omdat die terme van ’n trustakte dit eis, is niks anders as ’n terugkeer tot die Middeleeue nie, toe uitsluitel gegee is op wetenskaplike kwessies deur ’n ‘bul’ of formele uitspraak van die Pauslike stoel – ’n metode wat nog vandag deur Rome gevolg word<sup>317</sup> (Du Plessis, 1932e: 324-325).

<sup>315</sup> “that we simply hold on to the old, because it is old, and resist against scientific investigation of theological problems”

<sup>316</sup> The declaration reads as follows: “Ek, die ondergetekende, verklaar opreg voor die Heer dat ek van harte geloof dat al die artikels en stukke van die leer vervat in die drie Formuliere van Enigheid ... ooreenstem met Gods Woord, wat in al sy dele gesaghebbend, en die deur die Heilige Gees geïnspireerde, geinskripteerde heilsopenbaring is. Verder verwerp ek die volgende: a) Die beskouing dat Moses nie die outeur en skrywer is van die Pentateug nie ... b) die opvatting dat die Ou en Nuwe Testament nie in al sy dele onfeilbaar geïnspireer is nie; c) die beskouing dat Kristus enige fout, dwaling of feil in Sy gesproke woord kon gemaak het, of gemaak het, soos opgeteken in die vier Evangelies; d) dat Kristus enigeen van Sy goddelike eienskappe gedurende Sy omwandeling op aarde afgelê het; e) die Ewolusie-teorie, wat o.a. die dierlike afkoms van die mens leer; f) Teenoor hierdie dwaling geloof ek van harte dat die mens oorspronklik heilig en goed geskape werd, en dat hy as gevolg van die sondeval bedorwe is, met erfskuld, erfsonde en erfsmet belas is, en also skuldig is voor God, en dat hy slegs deur die geloof in Kristus, op grond van Sy volkome genoegdoening, teweeggebring deur sy lye en sterwe, opstanding en hemelvaart, verlos word, en deur die Heilige Gees wedergebore, vernu, geheilig en in staat gestel word tot alle goeie werke en heiligheid van lewe” (Du Plessis 1932d: 324).

<sup>317</sup> Even the Confessions do not bind us, and cannot bind us, to accept on authority what is proven or unsettled in a purely scientific manner. Scientific issues cannot be decided by an appeal to authority ... Thus, the authorship of the Pentateuch has nothing to do with our sanctifying faith; it is a matter of historical and literary knowledge ... The same applies to the theory of evolution ... To contest this theory, not by means of scientific arguments, but through an appeal to the Church and because the terms of a trust deed require it,



Du Plessis further pointed out that *his* way of thinking is what truly constitutes the Protestant or Reformed identity. Anyone supporting the *Gereformeerde Vaandel's* position, he argued, “shows that he has not yet come to terms with the first principles of the Reformation” (325). This is a principle that was even “taken up and defended” by Protestant scholasticism. For Du Plessis, it is the only position that is truly Protestant: “Dit is die egte Hervormde en Gereformeerde opvatting, en wat daarvan afwyk [is] anti-hervormd en ongereformeerd”<sup>318</sup> (324-325).

### 3.3.2. Confessional revision

The same professed openness to change is seen in discussions about the possibility, necessity and desirability of confessional revision. Confessional revision was, of course, not a topic of discussion confined to the South African theological landscape. As such, not all discussions about it were directly linked to the Du Plessis case. It nevertheless sheds light on the ideas of time and change in relation to tradition that prevailed at the time.

#### 3.3.2.1. Confessional revision prior to the Du Plessis case

Two examples dating from before the Du Plessis case, for example, already provide the framework within which most arguments about the issue took place. The question was if and how new scientific knowledge could be accommodated within the boundaries of confessional knowledge claims. Related to this is the question if and how theology as a science could develop and progress as in the case of other scientific fields.

In *Die Kerkbode* of March 1922, these questions were asked: “De vraag is dikwels gedaan, of dan alleen op theologies gebied er van geen vooruitgang gesproken kan worden”<sup>319</sup> (Anonymous, 1922: 402). According to the author, the massive progress and dynamism witnessed in other sciences was not reflected in theology. Accordingly, the abilities of confessions formulated in the 16th and 17th centuries to convey truths that can be reconciled with contemporary ways of looking at the world were questioned. In the eyes of contemporary believers, it is argued, these Formulae were starting to appear dated and out of tune with current ideas and modern philosophical and theological

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is nothing else than a return to the Middle Ages, when decisive judgement on scientific issues was passed by a ‘bull’ or formal pronouncement from the Papal chair – a method still used today by Rome.

<sup>318</sup> “It is the true *Hervormde* and *Gereformeerde* view, and what deviates from it is anti-reformed and unreformed”

<sup>319</sup> “The question is often exhausted, or then at least in the theological field where no progress can be discussed.”

developments (402). There seemed to be “geen vordering te erkennen of zelfs te begeren”<sup>320</sup> in the field of theology and dogma (403). It has led to an “impatient demand” for the revision and reformulation of the Confessions (402).

One may think that the author would deem confessional revision urgent, but in fact he is relieved that the churches have not yet given in to these demands and argues that theology is, after all, something completely different from natural sciences. For him, this distinction is based on the different sources or forms of knowledge on which theology and other sciences rely:

De theologie is voor zijn stof afhankelijk van de direkte openbaring van God; de natuurwetenschappen zijn daarentegen afhankelijk van onderzoek en ontdekking op het gebied der natuur ... Uit de aard der zaak zal er in dit laatste geval vermeerdering van kennis zijn, naardat er meer ontdekkingen gedaan worden, maar waar de goddelike openbaring genoegzaam in de Heilige Schrift is vervat en die als afgesloten wordt beschouwd, daar spreekt het vanzelf, dat er geen sprake van ontwikkeling in de theologie als zodanig kan zijn, anders dan in het juister begrip en in de betere uitleg van de Heilige Schriften en in diepere kennis van het menselijk wezen<sup>321</sup> (402).

Even in the light of ample new theories about the composition and origin of the Bible, he holds to the opinion that this new information is not of a sort that renders the current expression of the convictions and faith of the church as expressed in its official confessions insufficient (402). After all, the “Anonymous” argues, it needs to be remembered that the age in which most of the Protestant confessions have been pinned down had been a time in which theology “een hoogte van ontwikkeling bereikt had, die sedert nooit is geëvenaard”<sup>322</sup> (402):

De symboliese Schriften zijn het werk van reuzen op theologies en filosofies gebied, en het eist reuzen om hun werk na te zien en te verbeteren – en reuzen zijn in onze dagen zo volop niet!<sup>323</sup> (402).

This remark leads one to doubt whether “Anonymous” is consistent in his view of the

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<sup>320</sup> “no acknowledgment of or even desire for progress”

<sup>321</sup> Theology at its core depends on the direct revelation from God; the natural sciences, in contrast, depend on investigation and discovery in the field of nature ... Obviously, there will be an increase in knowledge in the latter, as more discoveries are made, but where the godly revelation is sufficiently contained in the Holy Scriptures and is considered as final, there it goes without saying that there is no question of progress in the theology as such, apart from a more correct understanding and better interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and deeper knowledge of humanity.

<sup>322</sup> “reached a height of development, which has not been reached since”

<sup>323</sup> The symbolic scriptures are the work of giants on theological and philosophical terrain, and it requires giants to review and improve their work – and giants in our day and age are not abundant!

(im)possibility of theological development, or whether he simply sees this development to have reached its height in the time of the Reformation. Despite his distinction between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge – a distinction that he regards as ruling out the possibility of development in theology – his argument seems to be that no position has yet been reached that renders the Formulae insufficient. This implies that such a position may indeed exist. Moreover, his insistence that *better* understanding of Scriptures and a *deeper* knowledge of human beings are indeed possible also suggests that he works from some sort of progressivist mindset.<sup>324</sup>

In reaction to this opinion, however, another correspondent regards the idea that no further theological development is possible or appropriate after the theological “golden age” of the 17th century as unhealthy (Student, 1922: 619). If Luther were to have a similar point of view, he argues, there would have been no Reformation whatsoever (619). “Developed Protestants” are not bound to a slavish adherence (“slaafse navolging”) of 17th-century formulae (619). He continues:

‘Juiste begrip’ van die Heilige Skrifte en ‘dieper kennis’ van die menslike wese is nie dinge wat vir ewig kan vasgestel word nie – al was daar teologiese ‘reue’ aan die werk. Die Kristelik teologiese eeugees is, onder Gods bestuur, iets wat voortontwikkel en onderhewig is aan bevindinge op wetenskaplike en filosofiese gebied. Daarom verskil die uitgangspunte en gevolglik die uitleg van die Heilige Skrifte in verskillende tye gegee<sup>325</sup> (620).

Like “Anonymous” argument against revision, “Student”, too, considers the relation between different knowledge systems. For him, natural sciences aid Biblical interpretation (620). He regards science not as something based on human genius but on God’s revelation (620). For him, it would be impossible for humans to grasp the secrets of nature if it was not that God had revealed them (620). This implies that natural sciences are also revelation and, according to the author, the ways in which it has illuminated, for

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<sup>324</sup> It is worth noting that support for the idea that confessions need to be translated into more contemporary language was often found among those who rejected the idea of confessional revision. The reformulation of the Verenigde Vrije Schotze Kerk, for example, was commended. (Anonymous 1922: 402; Student 1922: 620). This raises the question of the relationships between metaphor, language and (religious and scientific) understanding, and how this relates to confessional documents and the ways they enable or limit understanding and interpretation. See Gerhart & Russel (2004: 13-38) for a good exploration of these questions.

<sup>325</sup> ‘Correct understanding’ of the Holy Scriptures and ‘deeper knowledge’ of humanity are not things that can be determined for eternity – even though theological giants were at work. The Christian theological spirit of the time is, under God’s management, something that continues to develop and is subject to findings on scientific and philosophical terrain. Therefore, the premises and consequently the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures differ at different times.

example the story of Creation, are well-known (620).

It therefore seems that these two opposing positions are largely based on the same ideas. The difference is that “Anonymous” does not see the current scientific developments as really challenging traditional Christian dogma yet, whereas “Student” holds that it does.

### 3.3.2.2. Confessional revision during the Du Plessis case

Du Plessis, despite his general defence that his views can be accommodated within the boundaries of the Formulae, was outspoken about the fact that confessional revision was indeed necessary. In 1932, for example, he wrote a long article on the Formulae (1932f: 270-278). If one is to ask whether certain things in the Formulae ought to change, Du Plessis writes, there is only one answer: “Ja, veel!”<sup>326</sup> (Du Plessis, 1932f: 274). He gave a lengthy discussion about the work of Van Toorenenbergen and Doedes, and then concluded:

En hiermee beskou ons dat ons bewering gestaaf is dat daar veel, seer veel, in ons Geloofsbelydenis en in ons Katechismus beide, te vinde is, ‘dat niet staat op die hoogte, en niet beantwoordt aan de eisen, van onze tijd’<sup>327</sup> (275).

Olivier also highlights Du Plessis’ view that time had outgrown the Formulae in some regards:

Hy wou die konfessies nie ‘onjuis’ of ‘verkeerd’ noem nie, maar eerder ‘onvolmaak.’ Toe regter Gardiner die eiser daarop wys dat hy ’n verpligting het om hulle te onderhou, het hy gesê: ‘Ek sal nie verder as dit gaan nie. Enigiets wat onvolmaak is, is vatbaar vir verbetering. Hulle is ‘onvolmaak’ omdat hulle dinge bevat ‘wat die tyd ontgroeit’<sup>328</sup> (Olivier, 1990: 180-181).<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> “Yes, a lot!”

<sup>327</sup> And with this, we consider our claim substantiated that there is a lot, really a lot, to be found in both our Confessions and in our Catechism, ‘which is not current, and does not meet the requirements, of our time’.

<sup>328</sup> He did not want to call the confessions ‘incorrect’ or ‘wrong’, but rather ‘imperfect.’ When Judge Gardiner pointed out to the claimant that he has a duty to keep them, he said: ‘I will not go further than this. Anything which is imperfect can be improved. They are ‘imperfect’ because they contain things ‘that have outgrown the time.’

<sup>329</sup> Du Plessis did not deny the importance of Confessions for the church. And even his argument for their importance has a developmental or evolutionary undertone: “Daar is wel kerke (of liever *kringe*), wat sig Kristene noem en daarby die mening huldig, dat hulle sonder ’n belydenisskrif kan klaarkom, dog hulle behoort tot die orde van ongewerwelde genootskappe. Daar is in die natuur beide gewerwelde en ongewerwelde diere, dog natuurkundiges is dit almal eens dat laasgenoemde orde van diere aanmerklik laer staan in die skeppingsrang as eersgenoemde. En dit geld ook van kerkgenootskappe” (Du Plessis, 1931a: 225).

Du Plessis also drew the distinction between living convictions and dead tradition (“oorlewing”), and asked whether the church should not shed some of its “redundant and outdated beliefs” in the same manner that a bird sheds its feathers (Du Plessis, 1931a: 226). In this way, he wrote, the remaining beliefs could be inspired tenfold with power and life (226).

Du Plessis supported his own position by drawing on the discussions on confessional revision taking place in the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands at the time (Synods of 1920, 1926, 1927 and the work of the HH Kuyper Commission and the Hepp Commission) (Du Toit, 1926: 256; Du Plessis, 1927: 354-355):

Als de Geref. Kerk in Nederland de behoefte aan herziening van de Belydenisschriften gevoelt, is het dan niet hoog tyd dat ook wy, leden van de Ned. Geref Kerk die behoefte erkennen, en ons niet laten binden door 'n formulering die op sommige punten verouderd en ontgroeid is<sup>330</sup> (Du Toit, 1926: 256)<sup>331</sup>.

Van Rooyen, however, reacted strongly to Du Plessis’ depiction of the Dutch situation (Van Rooyen, 1928a: 238-241). He set out to show that Du Plessis’ understanding of the Dutch discussion of confessional revision was misconstrued and accused Du Plessis of propagating the idea that the Formulae are dated (“verouderd”) and no longer of use. He argues that there is a significant difference between Du Plessis’ understanding of revision and that of the Dutch churches. When Du Plessis speaks about revision, it includes a renewal of the Confessions that would endorse the “moderne, Skrif-versplinterende en Skrif-ondermynende tydsgees”<sup>332</sup> (241). But revision as envisioned by the Dutch, according to Van Rooyen, is something that would lead to an even sharper formulation of what is already stated, and one that would oppose the very zeitgeist (“daardie tydsgees die **hoof te bied**”<sup>333</sup>) (241). For Van Rooyen, such a revision would pertinently negate the trends of historical criticism:

As ons egter ‘Het Zoeklicht’ reg verstaan dan wil die Redakteur nie Belydenisuitbreiding om hedendaagse dwalings en Skrif-verwaterende kritiese stromings teë te gaan nie, maar Belydenis-verandering om veral die kritiese vindings ’n sekere locus standi in ons Kerklike lewe te verskaf! Immers, ‘Het Zoeklicht’ sê onomwonde dat die bestaande Belydenis van ons Kerk

<sup>330</sup> If the Reformed Church in the Netherlands felt the need to review some of the Confessions, is it not about time that we, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, acknowledge the need, and not let ourselves be bound by a formulation which is dated and has been outgrown on some points.

<sup>331</sup> Du Plessis responded to a letter by G.D. Du Toit.

<sup>332</sup> “modern, Scripture-splintering and Scripture-undermining zeitgeist”

<sup>333</sup> Original emphasis

‘verouderd’ is, en dat ons dit ‘ontgroeï’ het. Dit is heeltemal iets anders as wat in die Nederlandse Geref. Kerke bedoel word met die ‘uitbou’ van die Belydenis<sup>334</sup> (241).

Elsewhere, Van Rooyen also criticised Du Plessis’ views and denounced them because they violate the subscription formula (Van Rooyen, 1928b: 130-136). For Van Rooyen, there is room for *expansion* but never for revisions or corrections of the Confessions (1928a: 241; 1930b: 12). He was clear on what kind of expansions are allowed and quoted extensively from correspondence with the Dutch Professors van Gelderen and Grosheide in order to support his view:

Die antwoorde kom respektiewelik neer nie op hersiening van die Belydenisskrifte nie, maar wel op **skerper formulering** o.a. van die gesag van die Heilige Skrif teenoor die kritiese strominge van die moderne tyd (van Gelderen), en verder op die **uitbreiding** van die bestaande Belydenisskrifte (...), óf deur die opstel van ’n nuwe Belydenis óf deur aanvulling en inlassing in die bestaande Belydenis; en daarby gesê ’n uitbreiding in die **‘ou-Gereformeerde gees’** (Grosheide), en nie om die leer-verkragtende modernisme in die mond te spreek nie<sup>335</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1930b: 12).<sup>336</sup>

The draft of the eight articles prepared by the Hepp Commission appointed at the 1927 Dutch Synod at Arnhem is then stated in full, together with Prof. Hepp’s recommendations. Van Rooyen gives his approval of the work done by the Hepp Commission and expresses his confidence that this expansion was undertaken in the “old Reformed spirit” (15). In Van Rooyen’s opinion, it dealt appropriately and sufficiently with the “contemporary heresies regarding the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scripture, and rejects those heresies without hesitance” (15-16). The work further enjoys his approval because it was only a “supplement to the old tested and powerful Belgic Confession, and it was not meant to displace it” (16). He also praises the soberness with which it was approached:

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<sup>334</sup> If, however, we understand ‘Het Zoeklicht’ correctly, then the Editor does not want to oppose the expansion of the Confessions because of contemporary heresies and Scripture-diluting critical trends, but to change the Confessions to provide a sort of locus standi for critical findings, in particular, in our Churchly life! After all, ‘Het Zoeklicht’ says unequivocally that the Confessions of our Church are ‘dated’, and that we have ‘outgrown’ them. This is something completely different from what is meant in the *Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerke* by the ‘development’ of the Confessions.

<sup>335</sup> The answers respectively boil down not to reviewing the Confessions, but rather to sharper formulation, amongst others, of the authority of the Holy Scriptures in contrast to the critical trends of the modern time (van Gelderen), and further to the expansion of the existing Confessions (...), or through the compilation of a new Confession or through supplementation to and insertion into the existing Confessions; and an expansion in the ‘old Reformed spirit’ (Grosheide), and not to preach the doctrine-violating modernism.

<sup>336</sup> Original emphases.

In so 'n ernstige saak as die 'uitbou' van die Belydenis, moet daar nie op haastige, onbekookte en oppervlakkige wyse gehandel word nie ... Sulke Belydenis-bou, as dit nodig word moet altyd offisieel deur die Kerk self gedoen word, en nie die werk van geraasmakende en vlakke heethoofde wees nie<sup>337</sup> (16).

It is exactly such superficial and hasty behaviour of which Du Plessis accused the Free State church. Despite Du Plessis' advocacy for confessional revision, he admitted that it was a difficult and far-reaching thing to do. Therefore, he abided with the reality that

... ons op hierdie tydstip maar moet berus in ons oue, swak-geformuleerde Belydenisse, totdat in Gods goeie tyd daar weer 'dae van verkwikking van die aangesig des Heren' oor sy duurgekoopte Kerk aanbreek. In die gloed van 'n nuwe lewe, en onder die besieling van die Heilige Gees, sal wat nou moeilik en haas onmoontlik lyk, 'n maklike taak word – die hersiening van ons oue geloofsbelydenis by die lug van 'n nuwe en kragtige geestelike ontwaking<sup>338</sup> (Du Plessis, 1932d: 276).

Elsewhere, Du Plessis gave two other reasons why confessional revision was not desirable at the time (Du Plessis, 1931a: 225-229). The first is the rise and prominence of other world religions and atheism – factors that would cause confessional differences between Christian denominations to dwindle, Du Plessis argued (226). That being the case, confessional revision will be an impractical thing to do, because there is a need for Christianity to form a united front. Secondly, Du Plessis argued that the present time was one of critique and not one of construction as was the time of the Reformation. That was a time that brought forth “monuments of knowledge and piety” but their time, Du Plessis held, was a time when science forced theology to examine its foundations. This testing and examining of the foundations should be completed before the church can attempt to revise its confessions (Du Plessis, 1931a: 226-229).

Given the undesirability of confessional revision, Du Plessis proposed two practical aims that the church could strive towards. The first is “to emphasise points of agreement rather

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<sup>337</sup> In such a serious case such as the 'development' of the Confessions, behaviour should not be haste, ill-considered and superficial ... Such Confession building, if it becomes necessary, should always officially be done by the Church itself, and not be the work of loud and superficial hotheads.

<sup>338</sup> ... we at this moment in time should simply live with our old, poorly formulated Confessions, until, in God's good time, there are again 'days of solace in the countenance of the Lord' dawning over his dearly bought Church. In the gleam of a new life, and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, what now seems tough and almost impossible will become an easy task – the revision of our old Confessions under the light of a new and powerful spiritual awakening.



than points of difference” (228). Difference of opinion was for Du Plessis a characteristic of Protestant communities and, pointing to freedom as an essential principle of Protestantism, he underscored the duty of Protestants to respect the opinion of others. For him, the points of agreement were bigger and more fundamental than the points of difference (228). Du Plessis’ second practical aim follows from this: it should be acknowledged that “there is room in our church for *more than one stream of thought*” (228): “Within the bounds of the confessions there is room for different opinions ...” (228). He continues his argument:

Dit moet ons strewe wees om in ons Ned. Geref. Kerke essensiële eenheid te behou, nie woordelike eenvormigheid nie. Absolute eenvormigheid, sonder een sillabe of letter van verskil, is ’n karaktertrek van die Roomse Kerk, waar die leer wat almal, sonder die minste afwyking, moet bely deur die onfeilbare Pous vasgestel word. Die manne van die Reformasie het die juk van pouslike oorheersing, ook ten opsigte van leerstellings, afgeskud; en sal ons nou ’een juk op den hals der discipelen leggen, hetwelk noch onze vaders noch wij hebben kunnen dragen?’ - soos Petrus sê (Hand. 15: 10). Na eenheid moet ons streef, nie na eenvormigheid nie. Eenvormigheid is iets meganies - elke sjieling-muntstuk wat uit die munt in Pretoria, of elders, kom, lyk presies soos elke ander sjieling-muntstuk. Maar eenheid is iets organies: dit is die openbaring van lewe en groeikrag, en die natuur vertoon temidde van sy eenheid ’n verbasende en bekoorlike verskeidenheid. Soos dit in Gods Natuur gaan, moet dit ook in Gods Kerk wees - eenheid temidde van verskeidenheid, en verskeidenheid temidde van eenheid<sup>339</sup> (228).

But the Free State Church acted with much more boldness. At its Synodical meeting of 1931, it was decided that additional statements were necessary to hedge the Confessions (Olivier, 1990: 171). These statements served as an addendum to the subscription formula and it was required of all ministers in the Free State to sign it (171). This remained the case until the 1970s (172).<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> It should be our conation to retain essential unity in our Dutch Reformed Churches, not uniformity of words. Absolute uniformity, without one letter or syllable of difference, is a characteristic of the Roman Church, where the doctrine that everyone, without the slightest deviation, should confess was determined by the infallible Pope. The men of the Reformation have broken, also with regard to doctrine, the yoke of papal supremacy; and will we now ‘put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?’ – as Peter says (Acts 15:10). We should strive for unity, not for uniformity. Uniformity is something mechanical – every shilling coin from the mint in Pretoria, or elsewhere, looks exactly like every other shilling coin. But unity is something organic: it is the revelation of life and vigour, and nature presents amid its unity a surprising and charming variety. As it is in God’s Nature, it should also be in God’s Church – unity amid variety, and variety amid unity.

<sup>340</sup> The statements accepted by the DRC in the Free State read as follows (see Du Plessis 1931b: 147-148).

*Leerstellings*

1. *Dat die Bybel Gods Woord is.*



Du Plessis referred to it as a fourth confession and expressed his distress about the haphazard way in which the church went about it (Du Plessis, 1931b: 144-150).

In die neem van seker besluite insake leer, het die Sinode van die Vrystaat sig gewaag aan 'n innovasie, wat verreikende gevolge kan hê. Nog nooit is soiets geskied, nog nooit is soiets nodig gewees, in die geskiedenis van daardie Kerk. Totnogtoe was sy Wetboek voldoende vir alle sake van kerklike administrasie, en die Drie Formuliere was vir hom voldoende om die leer te handhaaf en alle leergeskillte te besleg. Nou het dié Kerk dit nodig geag, *sonder dat daar teen enige van haar leraars of ouderlinge enige klag van onregsinnigheid was*, en met die oog op blote *gebeurlikheid*, om sy belydenis uit te bou, of uit te brei, of in ieder geval, daar 'n verklaring en toevoeging aan te heg. Bowendien is dit nie slegs besluite wat in die Sinodale notule geboek staan nie, maar besluite wat in die Wetboek sal opgeneem word, en waaraan elke aankomende predikant, onder ede, sy gehegtheid sal moet betuig<sup>341</sup> (144-145).

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2. *Dat die Bybel in al sy dele van God ingegee, en daarom in al sy dele onfeilbaar is.*
  3. *Dat die wonders van die Bybel nie deur die menslike rede kan verklaar word nie, maar alleen met kinderlike geloof moet aanvaar word.*
  4. *Dat die verhaal van die skepping en sondeval, soos vervat in Genesis, onfeilbaar geïnspireerde heilsgeskiedenis is.*
  5. *Dat die geskiedenis soos die Ou Testament self ons dit voorhou, tot ons heil moet gehandhaaf word teenoor die ewolusionistiese rekonstruksie-teorie van die Hoër Kritiek.*
  6. *Dat Jesus Christus nie alleen in etiese sin heilig en sonder sonde is nie, maar dat Hy ook intellektueel sonder dwaling, leuen en bedrog is.*
  7. *Dat die leer van Jesus Christus oor Moses as skrywer van die Pentateug, oor Jona en die vis, oor Dawid as skrywer van Ps. 110, oor die ganse Skrif, onfeilbaar is. Dat Jesus Christus altyd die Waarheid is.*
- Dwalinge*
1. *Dat die Bybel nie Gods Woord is nie, maar dat Gods Woord in die Bybel is.*
  2. *Dat alleen die religieus-etiese of geloofswaarhede in die Bybel van God ingegee en daarom onfeilbaar is.*
  3. *Dat die wondere van die Bybel deur die menslike rede verklaar kan word.*
  4. *Dat die verhaal van die skepping en sondeval, soos vervat in Genesis, simbolies of allegories kan opgevat word.*
  5. *Dat die kritiese rekonstruksie van Israel se geskiedenis in ewolusionistiese sin aannemelik is.*
  6. *Dat Jesus Christus met Sy leer oor die Oue Testament Hom soms geakkommodeer of aangepas het by die heersende menings van Sy tyd, dat Hy selfs dwalings van die volk, soos bv. dat Jona in die vis was, teen Sy beter wete, as waarheid verkondig het (Mat. 12: 40).*
  7. *Dat die leer van Jesus Christus, bv. oor Moses as skrywer van die Pentateug, oor Jona in die vis, oor Dawid as skrywer van Ps. 110, nie onfeilbaar is nie.*

<sup>341</sup> In the making of sure decisions regarding doctrine, the Synod of the Free State tried their hand at an innovation, which could have far-reaching consequences. Never before has something like it occurred, still never before was something like it necessary, in the history of that Church. Until now, his Laws was sufficient to sustain the doctrine and resolve all doctrinal differences. Now this Church has deemed it necessary, without there having been any complaint of absurdity against any of its ministers or elders, and with the view to mere contingency, to develop, or expand, its confession, or in any event, attach an

Du Plessis then continues by poignantly asking about the Synod's jurisdiction to make these changes to its confessions (145). In order to demonstrate the possible implications of such changes, Du Plessis provides a detailed discussion of the case between The United Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (1892)<sup>342</sup>, and concludes from it that it is very clear that "die Kerk wat sy leer verander of uitbrei, daardeur sy konstitusie en sy wese verander, en dat dit kontrakbreuk is"<sup>343</sup> (147). Regarding the Synod of the Free State, Du Plessis argues that its recent decision boils down to a change of doctrine by a body who does not have the jurisdiction to do so (147), and in the face of a "free strong minority" who had fiercely objected to it.

An account of a member of the Free State synod published in *Het Zoeklicht* sheds some light on the minority's experience of this decision and affirms Du Plessis' view that it was an emotional and hasty decision. The author writes that only five minutes were allowed for the discussion of all fourteen points, "en daarna moes almal, predikant en ouderling, maar stem!"<sup>344</sup> (Lid van die vergadering, 1931: 181). Members of "die ou-paaie-groep"<sup>345</sup> (182), it is reported, supported the rushed process against minority objections: "'alles moet somar so *ineens* deurgestem word; *ons* sal aan die Transvaal leer hoe spoedig teologiese vraagstukke kan afgehandel word!"<sup>346</sup> (182).<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, it is reported that members of the majority group started laughing when it was suggested that cooperation with the Transvaal Church be sought for the sake of uniformity amongst the Reformed churches in aspects of doctrine (182). The author argues that the Free State Church wilfully decided that it wanted to take an "epoch-making" (182) decision and therefore rejected suggestions seeking more moderate outcomes. In reaction to objections raised by the minority, a member of the majority group exclaimed "[o]ns volg nie Hofmeyr en Kuyper nie; ons volg die Skrif! (met merkbare nadruk op die tweede *ons*)"<sup>348</sup> (183), followed by loud cheers. From this, the author concludes that the majority of the Free State Synod "unequivocally posed as a *new* generation of interpreters of

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explanation and addition. Moreover, it is not only decisions that are recorded in the Synodical minutes, but also decisions that will be included in the Laws, and to which every arriving minister will have to assert his devotion.

<sup>342</sup> See Du Plessis 1931b: 146-147.

<sup>343</sup> "the Church that changes or expands its doctrine, thereby changing its constitution and nature, is in breach of contract"

<sup>344</sup> "and after that everyone, minister and elder, simply had to vote!"

<sup>345</sup> "the old-ways-group"

<sup>346</sup> "'everything should so suddenly simply be voted in; we will teach the Transvaal how quickly theological issues can be resolved!'"

<sup>347</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>348</sup> "we do not follow Hofmeyr and Kuyper; we follow Scripture! (with noticeable emphasis on the second we)"

Scripture”<sup>349</sup> who no longer feel themselves comfortable on the Calvin-Kuyper-Hofmeyr foundation (183).<sup>350</sup>

### 3.3.2.3. Confessional revision in the aftermath of the Du Plessis case

Even though the majority of the DRC did not go to the extremes of the Free State Synod, it can safely be concluded – given the course the Du Plessis case took – that it is a good reflection of the majority’s understanding of what subscription to the Formulae meant.

However, discussions on confessional revision after the Du Plessis case resemble the pattern that has come to the fore up to this point: Du Plessis and his supporters were not that far removed from their opponents on the matter of confessional revision. Three examples will be presented to demonstrate this point.

In June 1934, *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* stated that, in principle, there can be no objection to confessional revision “mits alleen dit langs die wettige weg geskied ...”<sup>351</sup> (GV, 1934a: 164). It is affirmed that the Confessions are not “sacrosanct” in the same way that Scripture is, and therefore revision is permissible. But what is not permissible is “that any individual, however competent he may be, makes adjustments to it” (164), for this “would open the door to all kinds of frenzy, and would rob the church of the solidity of its foundation” (164). Notably, the reason given for why revision or expansion may be necessary is “die toestande en eise van die teenswoordige tyd”<sup>352</sup> (164). However, the author holds that the more important question to consider is whether it is *desirable* for the Confessions to be revised or expanded (164), and especially, whether it is desirable in “hierdie teenswoordige tyd” (164).

This is in agreement with Du Plessis’ position that confessional revision or expansion will

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<sup>349</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>350</sup> The member of synod continues his report on it as follow: “Die laaste skermutseling oor die Rapport van die toevallige leerkommissie het gegaan oor punt V, nl. dat met die beroep van ’n predikant, alvorens die groslys gevorm word, die hierbo uitgebreide formulier eers aan die beroepende vergadering sal voorgelees word. Meer dan een lid van die Sinode het gevra: ‘Wat is die moeties van hierdie voorstel?’ en het daarop gewys dat so ’n voorlees van hierdie leeruitbreiding alleen die uitwerking sal hê om aan die kerkraad te suggereer: ‘Pas op vir Du Plessis-manne,’ en dat so ’n suggestie die Hoogeerw. Sinode tog nie heeltemal waardig sou wees nie. ’n Invloedryke man in die meerderheid het geantwoord: ‘Natuurlik het ons ’n motief; mens doen niks sonder ’n motief nie; maar die Sinode het nie nodig om, as hy ’n wet maak, te sê wat sy motief of oogmerk is nie.’ En aanstonds was ook hierdie artikel dwarsdeur” (Lid van die vergadering 1931: 183).

<sup>351</sup> “only if it occurs in the legal way”

<sup>352</sup> “the conditions and requirements of the present”

be an extremely difficult task, and one senses that the DRC's lack of certainty on a variety of issues made it unwilling to even explore any possibilities.

A second example comes from the first volume of the series *Koers in die Krisis* (1935). D.F. Erasmus also affirms confessional revision in principle, but in practice declares it to be impossible (Erasmus, 1935: 109). Here, too, it is the "demands of our time" that are given as a reason for such revision.

Die kardinale vraag is egter op watter wyse dit moet gebeur. Moet die reeds bestaande Belydenisskrifte gewysig of uitgebrei word? Op hierdie vraag moet m.i. met nadruk ontkennend geantwoord word ... Die vraag is nou alleen maar, of dit moontlik is om sodanige nuwe Belydenisskrif waarin bogenoemde punte nader ontvou en duidelik geformuleer word, op te stel. Vandag of in die naaste toekoms sal dit seker wel nie moontlik wees nie, want ten eerste is die Kerke wat dieselfde Belydenisskrifte het, voorlopig nog onderling te verdeeld om hierdie arbeid gemeenskaplik te onderneem, en ten tweede moet erken word dat daar teenswoordige te geringe geestelike diepte in die Christelike Kerk is om sodanige werk van gewig en blywende aard te verrig. Die Belydenisskrifte wat ons besit, is almal gebore in 'n tyd in die geskiedenis van die Christelike Kerk, toe die geestelike lewe, ondanks, of juis miskien ten gevolge van, swaare druk van buite, hoog opgebloeit het, toe daar staal in die bloed was en 'n heilige geesdrif in die oog geflikker het<sup>353</sup> (109-110).

Also in 1937, as a third example, the same reasons and obstacles are listed. Here it is emphasised that even in "pure Reformed circles" and in their "highest church meetings" the need for revision or expansion of the Confessions is expressed from time to time (GV, 1937b: 35-36). Again the challenges of the present are listed as the reason: "met die oog op teenswoordige toestande wat natuurlik in meer as een opsig aanmerklik verander het sedert die 16e en 17e eeue, toe die Gereformeerde Belydenisskrifte hul ontstaan gehad het"<sup>354</sup> (35). But the "lack of unanimity in the most Reformed or Presbyterian Churches today about some of the cardinal teachings of the Christian faith" is said to make it

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<sup>353</sup> The crucial question, however, is in what way it should have happened. Should the already existing Confessions be altered or expanded upon? This question, in my view, should be answered in the negative with emphasis ... The question now is only simply whether it is possible to compile such new Confessions in which the above-mentioned points are more closely considered and clearly formulated. Today or in the nearest future it will probably not be possible, as, firstly, the Churches that have the same Confessions are provisionally still too divided to undertake this work communally, and, secondly, should acknowledge that there is currently too little spiritual depth in the Christian Church to undertake such work with effect and lasting nature. The Confessions we have all stem from a time in history of the Christian Church when the spiritual life, despite, or perhaps because of, severe external pressure bloomed intensely, when there was steel in the blood and a sacred enthusiasm flashed in the eye.

<sup>354</sup> "with the eye on current conditions that have of course changed drastically in more than one way since the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Reformed Confessions had their origin"

impossible to reach any formulation that would satisfy all parties while “preserving the central truths unscathed” (35).

As a solution to the widely acknowledged deadlock regarding confessional revision, *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* suggested that the focus should be shifted from confessional revision or expansion to “die intensiewer instudering van die Formuliere van Enigheid”<sup>355</sup> (GV, 1934a: 164). The years following the Du Plessis case were indeed characterised by an overwhelming emphasis on knowledge of and loyalty to the Formulae. The next chapter takes this development into consideration.

What are we to make of these opposing yet similar appeals to the Confessions? A first step, I would suggest, is to consider them not as theological arguments, but as questions about identity in which the past serves as a prominent point of orientation. The question with which the DRC was faced can be summarised as follows: do we have to change if we want to survive? In general, there seems to have been consensus about the fact that change is required. However, there was also consensus about the fact that change is risky. Hence, it was argued that though change is lawful and even required, it was dependent on a variety of things: it could only be embraced once a fixed new truth has been established or proved; it could only happen if the time was ripe; it had to follow the processes set out in the church order; it could only happen if it would serve and reaffirm established beliefs and identity; and it could only be attempted once a certain level of unity and unanimity was reached in the church.

These conditions maintained the tension between preservation and transformation, with a proclivity for preservation winning the day.

### 3.4. Conclusion

It has been argued that Du Plessis’ expulsion from the Stellenbosch Seminary was the definitive event that led to the wane of critical thought in the Seminary (Lategan, 2007; Nash, 1997). However, Elphick argues that Du Plessis’ defeat did not lead directly to the more conservative church of the apartheid era.<sup>356</sup> “Many Du Plessis sympathisers”, he writes, “remained leaders in the church and in Afrikaner politics” (Elphick, 2012: 161).

<sup>355</sup> “the more intensive studying of the Formulae of Unity”

<sup>356</sup> In his work, *The Equality of Believers* (2012), Richard Elphick pays attention to Du Plessis as “the founder of South African missiology” (152). The DRC’s missionary policy is widely regarded as the foundation of the Apartheid state and, as such, Du Plessis’ role in the development of this line of thought is an important part of his biography. For a discussion on Du Plessis’ stances on race and mission see Elphick (2012: 150-162; 222-233).

Some of these sympathisers became prominent figures in the Afrikaner nationalist movement (notably D.F. Malan and G.B.A. Gerdener), and others, like B.B. Keet, attained prominence because of their criticism of the DRC's campaign to justify apartheid by citing the Bible (161-162). Quoting Kinghorn, Elphick holds that the most ominous legacy of the Du Plessis case "was a stifling of biblical hermeneutics in the DRC, leaving it vulnerable to some deeply self-interested biblical interpretations in the apartheid era" (162). This correlates with Hennie Rossouw's understanding of the impact of the Du Plessis case on the DRC, summarised as an antithetical spirit of "introverted closedness" and "belligerent exclusivism" (Rossouw, 2000: 14).

The crisis that Du Plessis brought about for the DRC did not simply come to an end with either the conclusion of the case or his death. The meaning of the mark that the Du Plessis case left on DRC-theology and identity has many nuances. In his study of the Du Plessis case, A.R. Olivier concluded that the DRC did not succeed in settling or resolving the case. Rather, the case was simply adjourned (Olivier, 1990: 259). To some degree, this was also the case with the Liberal Struggle. In this case, too, the theological conflict at the heart of the conflict remained unsolved. The influence of liberal theology merely gradually waned, mainly because of the Stellenbosch Seminary and the establishment of the *colloquium doctum*. Following Olivier, we can also add that, after the Du Plessis case, the DRC was left in a dilemma of unsolved theological and ecclesial conflict.

One aspect of this unsolved conflict was the tension between preservation and transformation as possible strategies for relating to one's tradition. As this chapter showed, agents arguing for change did not always implement change, whereas those protesting against change, in the name of faithfulness to the tradition, contributed to new understandings and applications of the tradition. This was nevertheless done under the banner of preservation, which became a leading motif in the DRC's identity construction – specifically relating to the Confessions.

Although specific agents can be identified as the drivers of this disposition, preservation was also already embedded in the memory frameworks formed through the memory of the Liberal Struggle. This memory was a professed endorsement of preservation over transformation and we can argue that it was reinforced throughout the Du Plessis case. Preservation, we can argue, became an important characteristic of the Confessions as a site of memory.

"Struggle" is another such characteristic that was established in relation to the Confessions. In the Du Plessis case, the Formulae of Unity, in combination with the specific

subscription formula, were again affirmed as an instrument that could deal with theological conflict. Moreover, it was endorsed as a symbol worth fighting for and the DRC took pride in its own struggle efforts.

As has been pointed out, the assumed parallels and connections between the Du Plessis case and the Liberal Struggle were prominent hermeneutical points of departure in attempts to make sense of the Du Plessis case. This goes for initial attempts to come to terms with the case (as discussed), as well as more recent ones.<sup>357</sup> A description of the parallels between the events by G.B.A. Gerdener (1943) a number of years after the case has been closed is specifically interesting for the way in which it presents the gains and losses of the conflict. Gerdener's view gives us insight into a somewhat *matured* perspective on the Du Plessis case. He reflects on it about a decade after the conclusion of the case:

Die stryd tussen prof. Du Plessis en die Ned. Geref. Kerk laat in baie opsigte dink aan die agtjarige stryd teen die Liberalisme, tagtig jaar gelede. Al twee het gegaan oor leerpunte, albei het oor 'n lang reeks jare geduur, al twee het 'n nasleep in die geregshof gehad en albei het die kerklike publiek in 'n diepe beroering gebring. Gelukkig dat sulke strydjare nie elke kwarteeu voorkom nie. Hulle het ook wel 'n goeie kant: hulle laat ons almal weer 'n keer na Gods Woord as die enigste ware rigsgaer gryp en na die gebed as die middel om onself onder die seker leiding van die God van alle waarheid te stel. Hulle roep ons tot nuwe studie van en gehegtheid aan ons belydenis, en tot yweriger verklaring en verdediging van die Skrif en ons eie kerkleer. Dit alles en nog meer is bate. Maar die laste van sulke kerkstryde weeg swaar en sal op die duur te seer die gewone werksaamhede van 'n Kerk belemmer, as hulle kort-kort moet voorkom. Die haglike nasleep van vervreemding, verwydering en verbittering met die onvermydelike verslapping van die geestelike wasdom van die Kerk, om van die koste maar te swyg, verteenwoordig iets van die laste

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<sup>357</sup> See Gerdener 1943: 218; Lategan 2003: 103; Brümmer 2013.



van sulke onverkwiklike episodes in die geskiedenis van die Christelike Kerk<sup>358</sup>  
(Gerdener, 1943: 218).<sup>359</sup>

The pious way in which Gerdener describes the supposed gains of the conflict is notable: people will recommit themselves to God, his Word, and pray for his guidance. The theological payoffs of the struggle carry the same undertones. Theological conflict is depicted as being caused by people of weak character and a lack of diligence. A conflict as intense as that of the Du Plessis case then serves as a costly wake-up call to people to be more committed to the tradition.

The question is whether these gains announced by Gerdener can be seen as naturally springing forth from this event in the DRC's history. In the next chapter, it will be argued that the renewed emphasis on, interest in and understanding of the Confessions were not simply a natural aftereffect of the conflict, but a purposeful reaction to the dilemma in which it left the church.

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<sup>358</sup> The struggle between Prof. Du Plessis and the Dutch Reformed Church in many ways reminds of the eight-year struggle against the Liberalism, eighty years ago. Both were about points of doctrine, both took a series of years, both had an aftermath in the courts and both brought the churchly public into a deep commotion. Luckily, such struggle years do not occur every quarter century. They do, however, also have a good side: they let all of us again grasp at God's Word as the only true guideline and at prayer as the means to subject ourselves to the sure leadership of the God of all truth. They call us to new study of and devotion to our Confessions, and more diligent explanation and defence of Scripture and our own church doctrine. All of this, and even more, is an asset. But the burdens of such church struggles weigh heavy and will for their duration badly hinder the normal operations of a Church, were they to occur frequently. The parlous aftermath of alienation, estrangement and embitterment with the unavoidable dwindling of the spiritual growth of the Church, to say nothing about the cost, represents something of the burdens of such unsavoury episodes in the history of the Christian Church.

<sup>359</sup> Although Gerdener is sympathetic to Du Plessis, he is unambiguous about the outcome: "En as aan die ander kant daarop gewys word dat die Kaapse Sinode blykens die uitspraak van die regbank en sy eie terugtrekking van sy leerbesluite en vonnis hier en daar 'n ongereelde prosedure gevolg het, laat ook dan nie vergeet word wat op die spel was nie en hoe moeilik dit was om 'n uitweg te vind waar daar twee sulke sterk strome in die boesem van die Kerk aan die vloei was. Die behoudende stroom was dan tog die sterkste!" (Gerdener, 1943: 231).

## Chapter 4

### Sameness, stability and separation

#### 4.1. Introduction

The Du Plessis case was a painful event for the DRC, as its own vulnerabilities were exposed. In its aftermath, there was a renewed emphasis on Confessions as the foundation of the DRC. This period has been typified as a time of growing neo-Calvinism that eventually came to characterise the DRC (Vosloo, 2010b, 2012; Elphick, 2012: 238ff).

This chapter deals with the 1930s and 1940s as a time in which the DRC, together with Afrikaners in general, (re)discovered its own history and, by emphasising the continuity of this history, reconstructed its own identity. It will be argued that a mnemonic emphasis on sameness and stability led to an identity of isolation and separation.

The chapter starts off with a brief overview of the events that characterised the 1930s and 1940s, and the DRC's own understanding of this time. It is followed by a discussion of the DRC's self-definition as a confessional church, and then continues to show how its confessional identity was conflated with its understanding of its own heritage. The last part of the chapter discusses the interplay between past, present and future: how the DRC's understanding of its past informed its definition of itself in the present, and how, in turn, this informed their understanding of its calling and its hopes for the future.

#### 4.2. Crises and countermeasures

The Du Plessis case was generally seen as a disruptive event for the church (GV, 1934a: 162). It was an urgent matter for the DRC to overcome the distress that it has caused. Olivier has argued that the DRC was eager to bring the conflict to an end because of the challenging situations its members found themselves in. He wrote:

Die kerk kon net nie meer bekostig om met homself oorhoops te lê terwyl daar soveel brandende behoeftes en probleme was waarmee sy lidmate in

volksverband opgesaam was nie. Die kerk moes loskom van die stryd omdat die volk hom nodig gehad het<sup>360</sup> (Olivier 1990: 259).

This was a time characterised by a big concern for Afrikaner poverty amid the Great Depression of the 1930s, increasing urbanisation, supposedly widespread moral degeneration, the Second World War, growing concerns about race relations in South Africa, and general political polarisation among white South Africans.

Afrikaner poverty was the most urgent social crisis in white politics for most of the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the publication of the Carnegie report in 1932 caused a renewed focus on the issue (Giliomee, 2004: 267ff). The DRC appointed three study commissions to look at the Carnegie report, which led to a *Volkskongres*<sup>361</sup> in 1934 organised by the DRC's *Armesorgraad*.<sup>362</sup> The *Volkskongres* was immediately followed by a church conference as a first attempt "to prioritise and reorganise the church's principles regarding its care of the poor" (Vosloo, 2011: 78). The *Reddingsdaadbond* (Rescue Action Society) founded in 1939 can be seen as a direct development of these conferences and initiatives of the church.

The poverty question went hand in hand with the widespread and rapid urbanisation of Afrikaners that led to various social problems. Here, too, the DRC played an important role and hosted two conferences in the early 1940s (Vosloo, 2013: 20), and another *Volkskongres* in 1947 on "Die stadswaartse trek van die Afrikanernasie"<sup>363</sup>. The latter was preceded by a report, *Kerk en Stad*<sup>364</sup> (1947) that dealt with the situation of Afrikaners in the city (21). Vosloo argues that urbanisation challenged the DRC to change its identity and mission from a *Boerekerk*<sup>365</sup> to a *stadskerk*<sup>366</sup> (21), and shows that the DRC's view on urbanisation in the 1940s differed significantly from its earlier views (22). City life was at first depicted as a "graveyard for the Afrikaner soul" (22) but "slowly the awareness grew that city life (and the church in the city) can also be a blessing, albeit a mixed blessing" (23). This shift is most clearly seen in a booklet by J.R. Albertyn, *Die Boerekerk word Stadskerk*<sup>367</sup> (1942). As Vosloo writes, nostalgia for the rural life was met with a "practical

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<sup>360</sup> The church simply could not afford to be in conflict with itself while there were so many burning needs and problems with which its members as a people were struggling. The church had to break free from the struggle because the people needed it.

<sup>361</sup> People's congress

<sup>362</sup> Council for the caring of the poor

<sup>363</sup> "The move to cities by the Afrikaner nation"

<sup>364</sup> "Church and City"

<sup>365</sup> "Church of the Boers"

<sup>366</sup> "Church of the City"

<sup>367</sup> Church of the Boers becomes Church of the City"

realism that acknowledges the need to deal with the inevitable" (23). There was a new reality to adapt to and the DRC would help its members to do that. Moreover, it was emphasised that the DRC and the Afrikaners had a calling and a mission in cities (25).

The DRC's own understanding of the time can be summarised as one of impending threats. It is generally seen as a time of "disruption", "decline" and "deterioration" (GV, 1935c: 123, 125; GV, 1933a: 1), and increasing sluggishness and collapse ("ongeloof, bygeloof, sedelike verslapping en sektariese afsplintering") (Van Rooyen, 1942: 35-36).<sup>368</sup> Moreover, as Vosloo has pointed out, a multitude of dangerous worldviews were presented as threatening the church and her members: modernism, rationalism, communism, Romanism, humanism, cosmopolitanism, utilism, Irenism, liberalism and ecumenism (Vosloo, 2012: 416; 2010: 285). At the time, Vorster sketched the church as a rock amid a raging storm (Vorster 1936: 273). Different worldviews are likened to waves breaking on the rock, and not without taking its toll ("helaas! nie altyd sonder slytasie aan die rots nie") (273). Lategan, too, used the image of a rock amid a storm. For him, it was specifically the Confessions that served as this rock:

Rondom die vaste rots van die Belydenis, slaan die woeste bare van allerlei magtige strominge en golwe. Die bange vraag verrys: sal die NG Kerk as 'n Belydenis-Kerk staande bly en haar eie Geref karakter kan handhaaf?<sup>369</sup>  
(Lategan 1935b: 331).

Of specific relevance to this study is the fact that "belydenishandhawing"<sup>370</sup> was presented as one of the primary means of resistance against these dangers. The Formulae were presented as an antidote to the "time of turmoil and disruption" (GV, 1933a: 1) and as one of the "best countermeasures" ("beste verweermiddels") in the face of the dangers threatening the "costly heritage received from the fathers" (GV, 1935d: 101). Men and women were needed who were steadfast, immovable and strong in their faith and commitment to the Confessions (Vosloo, 2012: 419).

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<sup>368</sup> Vosloo (2012) summarises the depiction of the time as follows: unsettled, distressing, sinister and superficial, and characterised by "godsdienverslapping", "'n verlamende depressie van die innerlike geloofslewe", "toenemende beginselloosheid en papheid op godsdiensgebied" (2012: 415-419).

<sup>369</sup> Around the solid rock of the Confession, breaks various powerful currents and waves. The troubling question arises: will the Dutch Reformed Church remain standing as a Confession Church and retain her own Reformed character?

<sup>370</sup> "Confession assertion"

A particularly striking example of the Confessions depicted as a remedy comes from an article by E.E. van Rooyen in February 1942. He argues that the Catechism preaching is like a blood transfusion that holds all kinds of health benefits for believers:

As hierdie waarhede nou jaar vir jaar uit verskillende gesigspunte behandel en aan die gemeente deur die Kategismus-prediking ingeskerp word, sal vir die geestelik-sedelike welvaart van die Ger. Kerke deur die hele wêreld heen nog baie doeltreffender wees as die stoflike bloed-transfusie operasies wat geneeshere soms op mense toepas wat ly aan bloedarmoede. In sulke operasies word 'n hoeveelheid bloed uit die are van 'n *gesonde* mens getrek en in die are van 'n lydende en verswakte oorgespuut. Dit help soms baie. Die lydende ontvang also 'n nuwe en verhoogde mate van liggaamlike versterking en gesondheid. As ons nou die beeld mag oorbring an toepas dan wens ons die volgende te sê: Die sisteem-gebragte waarhede van die Heidelbergse Kategismus is die *geestelike* lewensbloed uit die are van die besondere Openbaring, die Bybelboek, en wat in die siel van die gemeentelid deur die troue Kategismus-prediking ingespuut moet word. Ook in hierdie vorm sal die genoemde waarhede 'deurdring tot die skeiding van siel en gees en van (geestlike) gewrigte en murg, en 'n beoordelaar wees van die oorlegginge van gedagtes en van hart' (Hebr 4: 12). Met ander woorde, die mooi-geordende waarhede van die Kategismus sal in die hart en verstand van die gewone kerklede al meer word 'n suiwere en onmisbare rigsnoer waarby hulle allerlei afwykende leringe en dwalinge kan keur en toets en afwys<sup>371</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1942: 36).

Van Rooyen depicts his time as one of increasing sluggishness and collapse<sup>372</sup> (“ongeloof, bygeloof, sedelike verslapping en sektariese afsplintering”) and he feels the need for an

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<sup>371</sup> If these truths are now impressed upon the congregation through the Catechism year in and year out from different viewpoints, they will be much more effective throughout the world for the spiritual-and-moral prosperity of the Dutch Reformed Church than the material blood transfusion operations that physicians sometimes do on people with anaemia. In such operations, an amount of blood is taken from the veins of a *healthy* person and injected into the veins of a suffering and weakened person. Sometimes it helps a lot. The sufferer receives in this way a new and increased measure of bodily strength and health. If we may now take this image and apply it, we wish to say the following: The system-borne truths of the Heidelberg Catechism is the spiritual life blood from the veins of the special Revelation, the Bible book, and what should be injected into the soul of the member with the faithful Catechism preaching. In this form, too, the mentioned truths will 'pierce even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart' (Heb 4: 12). In other words, the well-arranged truths of the Catechism will become all the more a pure and indispensable guideline in the heart and mind of the regular church members whereby they can screen and test and reject various deviating doctrines and heresies.

<sup>372</sup> Opposed to this chaos and decline, the truths of the Catechism are praised for being casted in a “mooië, bevatlike, en reëlmstig verloopende vorm” (Van Rooyen, 1942c: 36).

adequate and tested “voorbehoedmiddel”<sup>373</sup> and “redmiddel”<sup>374</sup> against this “siekteverskynsel”<sup>375</sup> (35-36). For him, the answer lies in “ernstige, gespierde, diepgaande prediking van Gods Woord... En nou is die Kategismusprediking by uitstek die prediking van die Woord”<sup>376</sup> (35-36).

As mentioned in the conclusion of chapter 3, renewed interest in the Confessions was said to be one of the positive spin-offs from the Du Plessis case. This interest included a renewed drive to study the Confessions in more depth (Gerdener, 1943: 218; GV, 1934: 162), a revived attachment to the Confessions (Gerdener, 1943: 218), a “newly awakened confessional consciousness” (GV, 1935b: 195), and the “flinke handhawing van ons beproefde Gereformeerde of Calvinistiese beginsels, en die konsekwente uitlewing daarvan op alle lewensgebiede”<sup>377</sup> (GV, 195). It is also said to have led to the fact “dat die fondamente by vele hefter geskud, en die geloofsoortuiging dieper gewortel is as ooit tevore”<sup>378</sup> (GV, 1934: 162). D.G. Malan, too, asserts that the aftermath of the Du Plessis case presents the opportunity for the DRC to “bravely continue building on the firm foundations” (Malan, 1935: 166). It seems that the renewed interest in the Confessions was not simply something that was hoped for, but was actually the case. However, I would argue that, given the amount of Confession-focused articles published, the *Gereformeerde Vaandel*, in particular, drove this.

However, the dark side of the struggle is also mentioned. Doubt and confusion were sown in the hearts of “developed congregants”, and the “so-called intelligentsia” were portrayed as opposing the Church and its understanding of truth (162). Indifference or recklessness toward the Holy Scripture and church doctrine were promoted, and the church and its ministry lost prestige to the benefit of various sects (162). Therefore, although Modernism had been warded off, the struggle is not over and continuous vigilance is called for (163). The threat is said to be much bigger than Du Plessis and it is on their very doorstep. Therefore, the church must “gird up” for the new tasks and new responsibilities that await pertaining the “eie volk”<sup>379</sup> and the “heidendom van Afrika”<sup>380</sup> (163). For these tasks, the church needs “all the power of the old but also always new

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<sup>373</sup> “precaution”

<sup>374</sup> “remedy”

<sup>375</sup> “phenomenon of disease”

<sup>376</sup> “serious, strong, profound preaching of God’s Word ... And now the Catechism preaching is the preferred preaching of the Word”

<sup>377</sup> “prompt enforcement of our proven Reformed or Calvinist principles, and the consequent realising of it on in all areas of life”

<sup>378</sup> “that for many the foundations are shaken stronger, and the beliefs, are rooted deeper than ever before”

<sup>379</sup> “own nation”

<sup>380</sup> “heathendom of Africa”

Gospel” (163). The church was called to fight for her heritage:

Nee, die N.G. Kerk sal moet bly voortstry vir die geloof, wat eenmaal (eens en vir altyd) aan die heiliges oorgelewer is<sup>381</sup> (163).

In the rest of the chapter, we will look into the ways the DRC defined itself as a community and also how, based on this self-definition, it responded to the crises of the time.

### 4.3. The DRC as a confessional church

The drive to affirm and strengthen the DRC’s truthfulness to its Reformed roots gave rise to a purposeful definition of the church as a confessional church that can be found in the discourses of the 1930s and 1940s. Analysing these discourses reveals, on the one hand, how the church understood the Confessions to inform its identity and, on the other hand, how it saw its identity as a so-called confessional church to be established.

#### 4.3.1. “Volkskerk”<sup>382</sup> or confessional church?

The DRC was very outspoken about the fact that it was a “confessional church” and rejected the label “volkskerk.”<sup>383</sup> The roots of this argument is in the Du Plessis case. In his 1932 defence at the Cape Synod, Du Plessis argued that the DRC is a “volkskerk” and should therefore allow room for a diversity of opinions:

Ek wens terug te gaan na die Kweekskool omdat ek ag dat dit in die belang en vir die heil van ons Kerk is. Ons NG Kerk was ’n staatskerk, die enigste godsdiensoorm in die land. Ons NG Kerk is nog vandag ’n volkskerk, ’n kerk wat daarop aanspraak maak dat hy die hele volk omvat. Nou, net soos die volk groter en breër is as alle politieke strominge en almal omvat, so moet die volkskerk groter en breër wees as die verskeide godsdienstige strominge en hul almal omvat. As die Kerk nie daardie ruimte het nie dan word hy ’n sekte. Die onderskeid tussen ’n kerk en ’n sekte is dit: ’n kerk sluit in, ’n sekte sluit uit<sup>384</sup> (GV 1936a: 66).

<sup>381</sup> No, the Dutch Reformed Church will have to struggle forth for faith, which once (once and for all) was passed on to the saints.

<sup>382</sup> “National church”

<sup>383</sup> For a historical overview of the DRC as a “volkskerk”, see Hermann Giliomee’s article *Het apartheid by die kerk begin?* (2013).

<sup>384</sup> I long to return to the Seminary because I believe that it is in the interest of and for the well-being of our Church. Our Dutch Reformed Church was a state church, the only form of religion in the country. Our Dutch Reformed Church is still a national church today, a church which claims that it includes the whole nation. Now, just as the nation is bigger and wider than all political currents and includes everyone, so the national



This statement provided Du Plessis's adversaries with more ammunition against him. Apart from the negative connotation that "volkskerk" had, Du Plessis's very definition of it as a church that includes different streams of thought aggravated his opponents. Without delving into the meaning that the term "volkskerk" obtained in the Netherlands, the confessional positions associated with it, or what Du Plessis may or may not have meant by it, we will look at the responses of D. Lategan and E.E. van Rooyen on Du Plessis's statement.

Lategan (1934: 332-334) rejected Du Plessis's idea of a "volkskerk" as a dangerous one that would deform the DRC and allow room for "all kinds of deviating currents" (334). It would also imply an abandonment of the church's "holiest heritage": the Reformed dogma as contained in the Confessions (334). He therefore expressed his hope that the Lord will protect the DRC from becoming a "volkskerk" (334).

Van Rooyen (1934b: 347-349) saw Du Plessis's statement as "big inaccuracy, a false understanding of the church, and a grave danger" (348). A "volkskerk", he argues, is unscriptural and unreformed, and it implies an openness to all ideas:

Hierby kom dit dat so 'n 'volkskerk' 'n gevaarlike ding is. Dit moet alle godsdienstige strominge omvat. Dus sulke strominge b.v. soos modernisme, arminianisme, Panteïsme, mystisisme, boeddisme, en wat dies meer sy... Dit is potsierlik ... En op die manier word trapsgewys die goud van die suiwer-gereformeerde geloofsoortuiging verdonker ... So 'n 'volkskerk' is 'n gevaarlike ding. Tot soiets mag die N.G. Kerk nie ontaard nie. Professor du Plessis stuur, volgens sy eie woorde, regstreek aan op so 'n halfslagtige, vaalbleke 'volkskerk.' Dit is verkeerd<sup>385</sup> (348).

Both Lategan and Van Rooyen were fiercely opposed to the idea of a "volkskerk."

In 1936, the question whether the DRC is a "volkskerk" was again addressed in *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* (GV, 1936a: 66-67). But this time the stance was more

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church should be bigger and wider than the various religious currents and include everyone. If the Church does not have that space, it becomes a sect. The difference between a church and a sect is this: a church includes, a sect excludes.

<sup>385</sup> With this, the result is that such a 'national church' is a dangerous thing. It should include all religious currents. Therefore, such currents, e.g. modernism, Arminianism, pantheism, mysticism, Buddhism, and whatever else ... This is ridiculous ... And in this way, the gold of the purely reformed religious conviction is blacked out step by step ... Such a national church is a dangerous thing. To such a thing, the Dutch Reformed Church may not degenerate. Professor Du Plessis, according to his own words, aims directly for such a half-bred, pallid 'national church.' It is wrong.

ambiguous. It is a “volkskerk”, it was argued, in the sense that the history of the DRC is closely intertwined with the history of the Afrikaner “volk” which started with Jan van Riebeeck (66). It is argued that the DRC has, since its inception, faithfully supported and guided the “volk”, and served as her spiritual inspiration (66). It also carried the “volk” through trying times:

In donkere tydstippe het die Kerk die volk bemoedig en in tye van gisting en beroering die essensiële volkseenheid bewaar ... Waarlik, *hy* is nie ’n goeie Afrikaner wat nie met dankbaarheid erken wat die Ned. Geref. Kerk vir ons volk gedoen het in die loop van jare nie<sup>386</sup> (66).

In the author’s specific depiction of the DRC as a “volkskerk”, he still distances himself from Du Plessis’s definition of it, and simultaneously defines the DRC as a confessional church. What it means for him is a resistance of Du Plessis’s openness for “all kinds of deviant perspectives and currents” (66) and the embrace of teachings that are “clearly outlined in its confessions” (66). The “bonte verskeidenheid van botsende beskouinge”<sup>387</sup> that would characterise Du Plessis’s version of a “volkskerk” is rejected in favour of the confessional church’s firm principles and discipline. However, the author was forthright about the DRC’s intimate connection to the Afrikaners.

#### *4.3.2. Historical continuity and the confessional church*

The DRC’s link to the Afrikaners and its history as a constitutive aspect of its self-understanding can also be seen in the way historical continuity was utilised to affirm the DRC as a confessional church. It is significant to note that historical continuity was harnessed, not only to legitimate the DRC but also to sanction the Afrikaners as a group. This was achieved in three steps with the Formulae of Unity as the main vehicle of historical continuity.

Firstly, the continuity between the confessional church and the early church was highlighted in order to affirm the confessional church as the *true* church. The church as a confessional church was argued to be a continuation of the church of the New Testament and the patristic time (De Lange, 1935: 204; Greyling 1937a: 151). Although “confession” or the “confession of the church” was sometimes used with reference to Peter’s confession in Lk 9: 20, this understanding of the confession of the church was often

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<sup>386</sup> In dark times, the Church comforted the nation and in times of agitation and turmoil protected the essential national unity ... Truly, he is not a good Afrikaner who does not acknowledge with gratitude what the Dutch Reformed Church has done for our nation over the years.

<sup>387</sup> “colourful variety of conflicting views”

conflated with the Formulae of Unity. An article by De Lange shows this fusion very clearly when he discusses the “origin and essence of confessional documents” (De Lange, 1935: 204). De Lange argues that the Formulae have their origin in the church of the New Testament (204). Accordingly, he states that the confessions originated with the church itself and that the church has been a confessional church since its inception (204).

Secondly, by narrating the history of the DRC, it was affirmed that she was indeed linked to the Reformation and was as such a confessional church. The DRC’s historical continuity with the Dutch church is emphasised, and through that, continuity with the Synod of Dordt (Lategan, 1935a: 315-320). It was said to be an indisputable fact that the DRC in South Africa is the “daughter” of the “Mother church” in the Netherlands (GV, 1935a: 258). Moreover, the narrative emphasised that the DRC was “planted” in South Africa “only four years after the end of the Eighty Year Long Wrestle between the small Protestant-Reformed Netherlands and the mighty Roman Catholic Spain” (258). As a further emphasis of the DRC’s historical closeness to the churches of the Reformation, it is stated that she was established a “mere 33 years after the Synod of Dordt” (258).

Thirdly, the Afrikaners are depicted as a group whose history is tightly knit with that of the DRC so as to emphasise the role of a strong commitment to the Formulae in the shaping of a people:

Gedurende die ganse tydperk van ons volkshistorie was dit die Gereformeerde of Calvinistiese geloofsoortuiging, wat ons Afrikaner volk rigting en leiding verskaf het, en wat hulle staande gehou het in die donkerste van tydsgewrigte, bv. tydens die Groot Trek en die Anglo-Boere oorlog. Ja nog meer. Na ’n lange worsteling met die Staat, wat hom met die innerlike aangeleenthede van die Kerk ingemeng het, het die NG Kerk eindelik in 1843 sy Ordonnansie gekry. Hierin nou word by wyse van Parlementêre Akte vasgelê, dat die Kerk sy geloofsbelydenis uitdruk in die drie Formuliere van Enigheid, wat met Gods Woord ooreenkom<sup>388</sup> (GV 1935a: 258).

The Afrikaners’ role in safeguarding the Confessions during the Liberal Struggle was also emphasised. It is depicted as a time during which the Calvinist foundation of the church was under serious threat, but a time during which the leaders of the church “die ene ware,

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<sup>388</sup> During the entire time of the national hysteria, it was the Reformed or Calvinist belief that provided direction and guidance to our Afrikaner nation, and what kept them standing in the darkest times, e.g. the Groot Trek and the Anglo-Boer War. Yes, still more. After a long struggle with the State, which interfered in the inner workings of the Church, the Dutch Reformed Church eventually received its Ordinance in 1843. In this is captured by Parliamentary Deed that the Church expresses its confession of beliefs through the three Formulae of Unity, which is aligned with God’s Word.

hegte fondament opnuut gehandhaaf en beklemtoon het”<sup>389</sup> (258).

This narrative of the Afrikaners’ interwovenness with the Formulae of Unity is also used as moral imperative: “[T]he DRC would thus simply be disloyal to its historical origin and development if it would no longer wish to be purely Calvinist today” (258). Earlier the obligation of this loyalty is even more vividly expressed when it is stated that “’n Belydeniskerk wat nie erns maak met die handhawing van haar Belydenis nie, selfmoord pleeg”<sup>390</sup> (OP, 1930: 299).

A specific historical narrative was an essential part of the DRC’s identity construction, and served to affirm their sameness with the early church and the church of the Reformation.

#### *4.3.3. The main elements of a confessional church*

Being a confessional church, moreover, meant very definite things for the DRC as a community.

D.R. Snyman (1929: 371-374), for example, spells out the “elementary principles of a confessional church” as consisting of the following: a definite and well-defined conviction that is expressed through the church’s confession (371), the total agreement and embrace of this conviction by all who join the church (371), and a wholehearted unity of conduct (373). In accordance with this, he sees the function of the Formulae as ensuring unity, univocity and stability (372-373). This opinion is shared by Greyling who holds that the Formulae are “a communal declaration of like-minded people of the truth contained in the Bible” (Greyling, 1937a: 150). This truth, he continues is “spread in a disorderly fashion in the Bible” but in the Confessions it is systematised in a logical order (150). W.M. Brits views the confessional church as the provider of “grondige kennis, sekerheid, vastigheid”,<sup>391</sup> although he laments that these things are not to be found in the DRC of his time (Brits, 1934: 454).

The subscription formula plays an important role in maintaining this vision of the confessional church. Subscription to the Formulae of Unity enables the order and discipline in the confessional church (Greyling, 1937a: 151), and this again ensures “the preservation of the unity and purity of the teaching of the church” (Greyling, 1937b:

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<sup>389</sup> “maintained and emphasised the one true, firm foundation anew”

<sup>390</sup> “a confessional church that is not serious about maintaining her Confessions commits suicide”

<sup>391</sup> “sound knowledge, conviction, certainty”

179).<sup>392</sup> Moreover, subscribing according to the “quia” or the “quatenus” position is important for the confessional church, as the latter does not allow for the strict enforcement of the Formulae but always “keeps a back door open” (Greyling, 1937b: 179). The “quia” position, in turn, obliges anyone who develops an objection against the Confessions to suppress it:

... hy [is] gebonde tot stilswye. Hy mag daardie beskouinge nóg openlik nóg heimlik voorstaan, leer of verdedig deur prediking of geskrif. As hy dit sou kan doen sou dit die deur ooplaai vir verkeerde propaganda, verwarring, stryd en leervryheid in die boesem van ’n Belydeniskerk<sup>393</sup> (179).

If congregants ever find themselves in disagreement with the teaching of the church, they should rather withdraw from the church than openly or covertly contest her (GV 1934b: 322).

Ironically, then, the DRC saw itself as a generous, tolerating body and took pride in it. As opposed to Rome, it was said that the DRC does not “force” anyone to confess or to adhere to its Confessions (De Lange, 1935: 206). Membership to the church was seen as completely voluntary and so, too, was one’s acceptance of and agreement with the Formulae of Unity (Greyling, 1937a: 150). Greyling argued that someone’s request to become a member of DRC was a declaration “that he too is a ‘*enersdenkende*’<sup>394</sup> who accepts the communal confession as norm or declaration of his faith” (150). Moreover, he argued that the Confessions “do not bind anyone”, and that someone is therefore always free to leave the church if such a person holds that a Confession is not in accordance with the Bible (150):

Ook lê dit nie die christelike vryheid aan bande nie want dit dwing niemand om dit te bely of te onderskryf nie. As iemand tot die kerkverband toetree en

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<sup>392</sup> See Van Rooyen (1934a: 310-312) for a discussion of the “verskerpte ondertekeningformulier” that was implemented by the Dutch Reformed Church of the Free State. The differences between Van Rooyen and Du Plessis on this matter are illuminating. Van Rooyen saw it as a “justified precaution” whereas Du Plessis called it a “powerless” mechanism designed “om geveinsdheid in die hand te werk.” In Van Rooyen’s reply to Du Plessis he was of the opinion that it does not create any “geveinsdheid, maar bring net tot openbaring ’n ‘geveinsdheid’ wat reeds vóór die ondertekening by die ondertekenaar aanwesig mag wees. Immers geen werklike eerlike man sal ’n Belydenis onderteken waarmee hy dit nie eens is nie. Hy sal liever buite die Kerkverband bly” (311).

<sup>393</sup> ... he is bound to silence. He may neither openly, nor secretly support, teach or defend those views through preaching or writing. If he could do this, it would open the door to the wrong propaganda, confusion, struggle and freedom of learning at the heart of a Confessional church.

<sup>394</sup> “like-minded person”

dit bely dan doen hy dit vrywilliglik. Dit voer geen tirannie in nie want dit dwing die konsensie van niemand nie<sup>395</sup> (151).

C.R. Kotzé viewed the Formulae as a solution to historical and contemporary discord. It is the only path to the “desired peace, brotherly and Christian love” (Kotzé, 1934: 367). “Here is our unity!” he wrote: “One in prayer, one in confession and witness and one in our pursuit of the expansion of God’s Kingdom” (367).

In essence, we can argue, the DRC saw the confessional church as a community with no room for ambiguity or differences of opinion. The Formulae of Unity are presented as an antidote to strife and a guarantee of peace and love within the church. Unanimity is a core characteristic of the confessional church, and subscribing to the confessions supposes one’s submission to this unanimity. On the basis of the age-old, tested Confessions, the confessional church is firmly and correctly rooted in the Bible. A compromise on any of these aspects puts the church in danger of betraying and losing its true identity.

#### *4.3.4. The rights, obligations and urgency of a confessional church*

The confessional church was also defined in terms of a specific understanding of the zeitgeist.

The 1930s were generally depicted as a period in which the DRC was tormented by all kinds of perils trying to infiltrate it (Lategan, 1935b: 331). These forces expected the church to give up “all principles for which the church had fought for many long years” (331), thereby threatening her costly history and heritage (331).

In the face of these dangers, the church was said to have certain obligations to fulfil, but also certain rights to which she was entitled. Lategan asserted that the church of the future is in the hands of the church of the present, and therefore, although trusting in God, the church should take up its plough and do what needed to be done:

Terwyl ons rustig sing: ‘Houdt Christus Zijne Kerk in stand, zoo mag de hel vrij woeden,’ wil ons tewens in stille en kinderlike geloofsvertroue die hande aan

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<sup>395</sup> It also does not limit the Christian freedom, as it forces no one to confess or adhere to it. If someone joins the denomination and confesses it, they do so voluntarily. It introduces no tyranny, as it does not force anyone’s conscience.

die ploeg slaan en werk en getuig vir die Christus Gods en Sy Kerk solank dit dag is<sup>396</sup> (331).

The central right of the church was her right to have a confession (Greyling, 1937a: 151).<sup>397</sup> Her corresponding obligations consisted of being a “pillar of steadfastness” (151), avoiding “those who deviate from the church’s teaching” (151), upholding “the Word of God against all adversaries” (151), and safeguarding “the purity of the confession” (Van Rooyen, 1934a: 311).

In addition to the right and the obligations of the church, there is also talk of a “confessional urge” taking hold of the church (GV, 1935a: 259). For De Lange, this urge to confess was a direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit (De Lange, 1935: 204).

A relentless attack on the Christian Student Association (CSA) broke out based on the belief that it inhibited the true confessional nature of the DRC together with the “confessional urge which is powerfully awaking in the DRC” (GV, 1935b: 195). The founding of a *Konfessionele Christen Studente Vereniging*<sup>398</sup> in 1935 over and against the *Christen Studente Vereniging* (CSA) is therefore praised on the basis of the “urge for an own independent churchly society” emerging from the “desire of members of the DRC to stand closer to the Formulae” (259).

For Van Rooyen, the CSA posed “a very real danger for the healthy development of ‘the own churchly life’ in the DRC” (Van Rooyen, 1936: 294).<sup>399</sup> The CSA exhibits a “papheid en

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<sup>396</sup> While we are singing calmly: ‘If Christ maintains His Church, Hell may rage freely,’ we also want to set the hand to the plough in quiet and childlike trust in God and work and testify for the Christ God and His church while it is day.

<sup>397</sup> In 1938, Greyling made the same argument in his discussion about the nature of Christian schools: “Die kerk en sy lidmate het ’n reg om ’n belydenis te hê. Die Skrif dra aan hom op om ’n pilaar en vastigheid van die waarheid te wees, om daardie waarheid voor alle mense te bely, om die wat van die leer afwyk te vermy en om die Woord van God teenoor alle bestryders te handhaaf ... Die waarde en nut van die teboekstelling en onderskrywing van die gemeenskaplike belydenis is dan ook besonder groot. Dit voorsien die lidmaat van ’n duidelike en bondige verklaring van die Woord van God ... Dit handig aan die nageslag die suiwer leer oor ... Dit bewaar die eenheid van die geloof in die kerk self ... Dit maak dit moontlik om tug en orde te handhaaf ...” (Greyling, 1938: 9).

<sup>398</sup> Confessional Christian Student Society

<sup>399</sup> As chairperson and general secretary of the CSA respectively, B.B. Keet and F.J. Liebenberg defended its work and outlook against the accusation that it was being neutral with regard to “our holiest spiritual goods” (Keet & Liebenberg, 1936: 309). They argued that being an interchurch organisation does not imply that it is un-church or anti-church (309). Moreover, given the fact that 85% of the members are from the DRC, the DRC practically determined the character of the CSA (309), and the support and input of DRC ministers were actively sought (310).



kleurloosheid”<sup>400</sup> (297) that the DRC cannot associate itself with, he writes. <sup>401</sup> Therefore, he supported the new society, which stands on “a positive and firm foundation” (297).

J.D. Vorster also criticised ecumenical movements like the CSA for subjecting confessional differences and the truth to a “week-gevoelige liefde terwille van die eenvormigheid” (Vorster, 1936: 273). They supposedly advocated the annihilation of boundaries which Vorster finds very upsetting:

Skeidsmure moet dus afgebreek word, grense moet uitgewis word. Of soos sommige wat meer behoudend is, wil: die Kerkmure kan bly, maar die lede moet bo-oor klim en een wees as die Kerk van Christus (273).

Although support for the CSA were also heard in the columns of *Die Kerkbode* (Van Wyk, 1935: 615-616; De Vos, 1936: 310; Veen, 1936: 519; Jordaan, 1936: 580), scepticism towards it and support for the proposed KCSV became widespread. In 1935, the DRC of the Free State, too, questioned the work of the CSA and praised the founding of the KCSV for its potential to become a “kragtige middel” to bound the youth to “die Kerk wat ons dierbaar is” (Uit die Vrystaat, 1935: 314). And in March 1936, G.J. Naudé reported that a circular sent to all minister of the federated DRC received 160 response of which only 27 opposed the KSCV (Naude, 1936: 519). In May 1941, the CSA at the University College of the Orange Free State disbanded, and a confessional society was founded in its place (Du Toit 1941: 1000).<sup>402</sup>

B.B. Keet, who was the chairperson of the CSA at the time, pointed to the emerging “trend” that aims to stifle inter-church cooperations by labelling it as “interkerkisme”<sup>403</sup> (Keet, 1937: 1064-1067). He warned against the “non-imaginary danger” that the DRC “in this very land where God had planted us” and with all the “wholesome fruits” it had produced in the past, will take the road of “secluded sectarianism” (1067). He continues:

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<sup>400</sup> “spinelessness and drabness”

<sup>401</sup> Van Rooyen also absurdly accuses the CSA of slyly planning an unconventional celebration of its 40th anniversary to coincide with the meeting of the DRC’s Cape Synod as a means to win its support. Van Rooyen argues that it is abnormal for any society or body to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

<sup>402</sup> In response to the disbanding in the Orange Free State, the CSA again published a declaration to justify its work and position (Du Toit, 1000-1001), to which P.A. Verhoef, F.N. van Niekerk and J.F. Retief responded by emphasising the God-ordained plurality of churches and *volkere* (Verhoef et al., 1941: 2044). The authors state that there is no difference of opinion on the matter, and that the existence of different peoples should be regarded as a blessing and not a curse “as it is in agreement with Gods plan and revealed will” according to Genesis 11 and Acts 17: 26b (2044). Ecclesial diversity is said to be in important coherence with *volkere-verskeidenheid*, serves a specific goal (namely, preventing chaos and restricting the working of sin), and is definitely in agreement with God’s will (2044).

<sup>403</sup> “inter-churchism”

... dat dit uit vrees of wat ook al sy roeping nie wil aanvaar om tot seën te wees vir die hele kerklike en volkslewe nie, maar hom gaan afsluit in sy eie kring, selfgenoegsaam en selftevrede, terwyl hy vergeet dat wie sy lewe wil behou, dit sal verloor ... Dit is nl. dat so 'n houding in stryd is met die waarheid wat ons bely. Dit is in stryd met die Christendom wat nie saak is van bloed of bodem, ras of kleur nie; die Christendom is wêreldwyd in sy omvang ... Dit is by name in stryd met die Gereformeerde Christendom wat hom nooit in 'n hoekie met 'n boekie opgesluit het nie, maar van die begin af internasionaal en interkerklik opgetree het<sup>404</sup> (1067).<sup>405</sup>

In 1939, D.G. Cillié considered whether the DRC was not running the risk of becoming isolated if it could not find a way to cooperate with other churches. He concluded, however, that being isolated was preferable to being “absorbed”, and that only by being separated the church could retain that “which is holy and precious to us” (Cillié, 1939: 113). “Association” will lead to “amalgamation” which would lead to “annexation” and eventually “absorption” (113). If that was to be prevented, the church had to make sure that everybody keep to its “own church” and its “own kind” (113).

This urge to confess was associated with a strong sense of self-identification: “Op kerklik eweas op kultureel terrein wil ons almeer *onsself* wees!”,<sup>406</sup> it was exclaimed (GV, 1935b: 195). It also went hand in hand with a growing appreciation of and emphasis on that which is regarded “as one’s own.”

A prominent example of this is a 1934 editorial in *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* that called for a clear distinction between true and false generosity (GV, 1934b: 322-326). “True generosity”, on the one hand, is said to be characterised by “a warm loyalty to the own church and the own confession” (322). It means to wholeheartedly believe that the truth as taught by the “own church” is the “purest interpretation of the truth” (322). This is needed if someone wants to find “himself sincerely at home within the boundaries of his

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<sup>404</sup> ... that out of fear or whatever reason he does not want to accept his calling to be a blessing onto the whole churchly and national life, but goes and secludes himself in his own circle, complacent and self-satisfied, while he forgets that the one who wants to keep his life, will lose it ... It is so that such an attitude is in contrast with the truth that we confess. It is in contrast with the Christendom which is not a case of blood or soil, race or colour; the Christendom is global in its scope ... It is by nature in contrast with the Reformed Christendom that never confined itself to a little corner with a little book, but acted internationally and inter-churchly from the beginning.

<sup>405</sup> Lategan (1937: 368-372) openly criticised Keet in *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel*. He accused Keet of the “unilateral emphasising of necessary truths” at the cost of “other indisputable truths (Lategan, 1937: 372). In his view, Keet placed too much stress on the “strive towards being inter-church and international” and neglected the “Reformed heritage found in our churchly teaching and traditions” (372).

<sup>406</sup> “On churchly as well as cultural terrain, we want to be increasingly more ourselves!”

own confessions, and move within it freely” (322).<sup>407</sup> Because the church is someone’s spiritual mother, it is argued, they owe everything to this church and ought to love her fiercely and support her with vigour (322). It is warned that an interest in the unified Christianity may interfere with the “complete loyalty to the own church and confession” (323).<sup>408</sup>

“False generosity”, on the other hand, is the idea that all trends should be accommodated in one denomination. The confessional church, it is argued, cannot entertain this idea for a single moment (323). For the DRC, the confessional church represented definite boundaries. Unity was something to be strove for only within the bounds of the confessional church, and then for the sake of being a unified front. Blurred boundaries were seen as a sign of superficiality (Greyling, 1937b: 181).

## 4.4. A divine but threatened heritage

### 4.4.1. *The contours of heritage*

In his history of the Afrikaners, Giliomee (2004) depicts the middle of the 1930s as a time in which “history returned.” One of the most remarkable things about public debate between 1902 and 1934, Giliomee writes, is the silence about the South African War (1899-1902) (Giliomee, 2004: 383). But in the 1930s, “a new generation of Afrikaners tried to discover themselves by identifying with both the heroism and the suffering of the war” (383). A series of popular books about the war started to appear, together with a flood of articles in newspapers and magazines (383).

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<sup>407</sup> True generosity is also said to be characterised by recognising and appreciating that which is good and deserving in other churches (GV, 1934b: 322). Because the godly truth is multifaceted, it is argued, no single person or denomination can ever fully hold or interpret it (GV, 322; Greyling, 1937b: 181). It also pleased God to have revealed himself in different ways in different denominations. In a similar vein, *Die Kerkbode* argues that others should also be allowed “to have their confessions in accordance with their own convictions based on God’s Word” (KB, 1936: 496).

<sup>408</sup> See also Greyling (1937b: 181): “Eers wanneer hy sy eie ken, lief het, waardeer en dien kan hy waardeer wat goeds is in die vreemde. Laat ons die voorbeeld van verskillende huisgesinne neem. Niemand kan help dat hy tot ’n sekere huisgesin behoort nie. Hy is daarin gebore of daarin gehuud en as lid daarvan het hy sekere pligte daarteenoor wat hy graag vervul: Hy moet sy huis eer, lief hê, verdedig, dien. Niemand kan hom kwalik neem dat hy dit doen nie en hy doen dit sonder om ander huisgesinne te verag, te vervolg of te benadeel. As hy moet kies tussen sy huisgesin en sy belange en ’n ander en sy belange, dan kies hy natuurlik altyd sy eie, maar sonder om die belange van sy eie huis prys te gee leef hy in vriendskap met ander. Hy voed sy kinders op in die tradisies van sy eie huis en nie van ’n ander nie. Hy erken die reg van bestaan van ander huisgesinne, ook dat daar altyd ander sal wees en dat hulle ook hul nut het. Hy is selfs gewillig om met hulle saam te werk op sekere voorwaardes” (181).

The interest in the past gained further momentum as the centenary of the *Great Trek* (1838) drew closer. Giliomee holds that this celebration was an opportunity for, particularly, D.F. Malan and his National Party to spread the message that the Afrikaners' struggle had always been one of survival and that they could only rely on themselves (383). Malan consequently highlighted the Afrikaners' fate in the cities as the biggest challenge to their survival (384).

Schalk Pienaar, who accompanied the wagons from Cape Town to Pretoria as part of the celebrations in 1938, summarised the significance of the centenary celebrations as follows:

“Dit was iets diepers wat in 1938 gebeur het. Die vreedsame waentjies het op positiewe wyse bewerkstellig wat anders met 'n volk op 'n negatiewe wyse gebeur wanneer daar oorlog kom, of reeds is, wanneer die volk homself in sy wese bedreig voel. Die waentjies het, soos Vader Kestell, die groot kerkman van daardie jare dit ingeklee het, die volk van sy bestaan magtig bewus gemaak ... Die hele volk is in die hart gegryp”<sup>409</sup> (Pienaar quoted in Giliomee, 384).

The role of the renewed interest in history in the life of the DRC is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In this section, the focus is specifically on heritage as a concept that became prominent in the DRC's discourses of the time.<sup>410</sup> The Formulae of Unity were depicted as a central aspect of the DRC's heritage. However, as we have already seen in the historical narrative on which the DRC founded its own identity as a confessional church (4.3.2), the Confessions was but one aspect of this past. In the discussions about heritage that follows, we will see how different historical narratives became one rich resource for the DRC from which to draw. Heritage became a conflated notion that included all aspects of the DRC's past. In the process, “Calvinist” and “Protestant” were used as synonyms and shorthand whenever the “purest” Reformed truth (as ultimately expressed in the Confessions) had to be indicated.

The self-understanding of the *Kalvinistiese Konfessionele Unie* (established in December 1934) serves as a good example to demonstrate this amalgamation of identity markers.

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<sup>409</sup> “It was something deeper that occurred in 1938. The peaceful little wagons established in a positive way what normally happens with a nation in a negative way when war comes around, or is already there, when the nation itself feels threatened at its core. The little wagons have, like Father Kestell, the prominent church figure in those years, explained, made the nation aware of its existence in a powerful way ... The whole nation was grabbed by the heart.”

<sup>410</sup> It deserves to be mentioned that, despite the rise of interest in the South African War in the public discourse, it was (still) largely absent from historical accounts in *Die Kerkbode* and *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel*.

The society's goals are stipulated to include the promotion of "knowledge of and love for the Word of God and the three Formulae of Unity, the truth and principles of Calvinism contained therein, and the maintenance and propagation of it on all terrains of life" (GV, 1935c: 125). Moreover, the establishment of the Union is viewed as a necessary event given "this time of disruption" (125).

The Calvinist nature of the Union is explained as implying that it interprets the Confessions "in Calvinistiese sin en gees in ooreenstemming met die Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk sedert haar ontstaan ..." <sup>411</sup> (123). This is said to be the ultimate way to deal with and read the Confessions, and it is argued that this is what the DRC agreed on and affirmed the struggle against Liberalism and the Synod of 1862 (123). <sup>412</sup> This Union and its name are therefore said to be in "complete concordance with the Calvinist essence and character of the DRC" (123), and only *its* interpretation of the Confessions is therefore legitimate:

Teenoor alle ander verklaringe en interpretasies wat aan die Konfessies mag gegee word in stryd met die ware wese van die NG Kerk, soek die Unie die Calvinistiese karakter van die Konfessies te beklemtoon <sup>413</sup> (124).

A further noteworthy aspect of the DRC's understanding of its heritage is the extent to which it was portrayed as divine providence. Divine providence was an important aspect of the DRC's understanding of Calvinism, but it also saw its very own identity as Protestants, as willed by God.

In various articles, for example, Gerdener argued that the soil for the Reformation has all along been "prepared by history" through the hand of God (Gerdener, 1939d: 1130):

... diep en verborge is die wortels van die geseënde planting van die Reformasie; ... [God self is] die ware Werker wat op sy eie tyd en wyse van aangewese manne gebruik gemaak het ... sodat ons slegs kan uitroep: Dit het van die Here gekom; dit is wonderlik in ons oë! <sup>414</sup> (Gerdener, 1939c: 21).

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<sup>411</sup> "in Calvinist logic and spirit aligned with the *Hervormde or Gereformeerde Kerk* since her inception"

<sup>412</sup> In arguing this point, the words of J.J. Kotzé against the Catechism is quoted verbatim. Moreover, the famous Ordinance no. 7 of 1843 and W. Porter's explication of it is quoted in length as proof of the DRC's Calvinist identity (GV, 1935c: 124).

<sup>413</sup> Against all other explanations and interpretations that may be given of the Confessions contrart to the true nature of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Union seeks to emphasise the Calvinist character of the Confessions.

<sup>414</sup> ... deep and concealed in the roots of the blessed planting of the Reformation; ... [God Himself is] the true Worker who made use of the appropriate men in His own time and way ... so that we can simply call: It came from the Lord; it is wonderful in our eyes!

Moreover, God's hand is seen in every historical event that brought the best Protestantism to South Africa. The soil in the Netherlands, writes Gerdener, was the most prepared of all for the Reformation (1939c: 22), and yet it was also the place where the "lange en bange stryd vir die Protestantse erfenis" was the fiercest (22). The Protestants of the Low Countries are sketched as having only God and themselves to rely on as they had no "emperor or king, law or state power" that looked out for them. "Vaderlandsliefde en geloofsmoed het mekaar in Nederland ontmoet ..." (22). It is this Protestantism that God also brought to South Africa:

Niemand wat met die geskiedenis rekening hou, sal kan ontken dat dit 'n beskikking is van die albestierende Vader dat Suid-Afrika 'n oorweënd Protestantse erfenis ontvang het nie... So het Jan van Riebeeck op 6 April 1652, die blywende nedersetting aan ons kuste geplant en daarmee die kosbare Protestantse erfenis hierheen gebring. Dit was klaarblyklik die leiding van die Allerhoogste (Gerdener 1939g: 161).

In the making of the Afrikaner people, the stronghold of its religion should therefore be recognised first and foremost (162). To deny it would be to deny history itself (162). Consequently, every "reggesinde Christen-Afrikaner"<sup>415</sup> should "look upon the provenance of their costly heritage with pride and gratitude" (162).

#### 4.4.2. *"Bloedbeseëde belydenisskrifte"*<sup>416</sup>

Protestant history was one aspect of the DRC's heritage that received a lot of attention. This history is depicted in dramatic terms, and the time of the Reformation as a time of persecution and martyrdom is emphasised.

In 1939, *Die Kerkbode* published various articles on the Protestant heritage and the threats it faced. This history is depicted in bloody terms. Protestantism is referred to as a "bloed gekoopte erfenis"<sup>417</sup> (Protestant, 1939: 707). Gerdener calls it "die bloedprys van ons duurgewonne erfenis ..." <sup>418</sup> (Gerdener, 1939e: 76), and continues by stating that the "historical faith handed down to us" was "sanctified" by the "centuries of persecution and torture" (Gerdener, 1939a: 1077). Elsewhere, Gerdener also writes of the sanctification

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<sup>415</sup> "Christian-Afrikaner with the right attitude"

<sup>416</sup> "Blood-sealed Confessions"

<sup>417</sup> "a heritage paid for in blood"

<sup>418</sup> "the blood price of our heritage won through blood, sweat and tears"

of the heritage “through the blood of the martyrs through all the years” (Gerdener, 1939c: 22).

Gerdener states his hesitance to speak of this “dark background of the Reformation” because it “fills the heart with agony” (Gerdener, 1939b: 1156). “’n Mens wil liever die gordyn daaroor toeskuif,” he writes, but yet it is necessary to fully understand how this heritage was obtained (1156). Later he repeats the same idea with more emotion:

[Dis] nie juis aangenaam om die bloedspore van die Christendom te volg nie. Dit is meermale grieselig en selfs walglik. Dit laat ons hare te berge rys en ons bloed stol in die are as ons die geskiedenis van die onnoemlike en onmenslike foltering en wreedheid lees<sup>419</sup> (Gerdener, 1939e: 76).

However, Gerdener spares no effort in his depiction of this bloody history. The trace of blood is an ongoing theme as he depicts the history of South Africa and *its* Protestants. Protestant history is hereby extended to also include Jan van Riebeeck. Van Riebeeck is depicted as the channel through which South Africa inherited the reformed faith from the Netherlands. This place of origin is sketched as the pre-eminent place of struggle for the Protestant heritage. The blood of martyrs flowed freely in the Netherlands, Gerdener writes, and when the Eighty Years’ War broke out, the “blood of Sea Beggars and Huguenots readily mixed” (Gerdener, 1939c: 22).

Van Riebeeck’s arrival in South Africa is dated as “slegs enige jare”<sup>420</sup> after the peace of Westphalia, making him a rightful bearer of the “vrygestrede en vrygelede erfenis van die Protestantisme”<sup>421</sup> (22). Elsewhere, too, Van Riebeeck’s (historical) closeness to the Eighty Years’ War and his identity as an “opstandeling” (“insurgent”) is asserted (Kotzé, 1941: 2071).

The bloody narrative of Protestant history is developed further so as also to include the *Voortrekkers* and the blood that flowed at the Battle of Blood River. Here the theme of blood thus shifts from martyrs to opponents:

In die vroeë ure van daardie stille feesdag het in die jaar 1572 die onskuldige bloed van tienduiseende Hugenote in die strate van Parys gestroom totdat die

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<sup>419</sup> [It is] not really pleasant to follow the blood trails of the Christendom. It is often gruesome and even repulsive. It lets our hair stand on end mountain high and freezes our blood in our veins if we read the history of the unspeakable and inhuman torture and cruelty.

<sup>420</sup> “only a few years”

<sup>421</sup> “safeguarded and exempted heritage of the Protestantism”



rivier Seine rooi was, net soos in later jare, toe die bloed van duisende Zoeloes die water van die Bloedrivier verkleur het<sup>422</sup> (Gerdener, 1939e: 77).

There is a “long line of men and women”, writes Gerdener, who are “worthy and unforgettable” because of their “blood-endorsed witness” (Gerdener, 1939c: 21).<sup>423</sup>

The Protestant history of martyrdom and persecution is also depicted as strengthening the esteem of the Confessions. Van Rooyen calls it the “kostelike en selfs met martelaarsbloed beseëde geloofstukke”<sup>424</sup> (1933c: 13). He criticises the DRC for not being appreciative enough of its Confessions:

Onbekend maak onbeminde, sê die spreekwoord. Gaandeweg, deur allerlei omstandighede, het die diepere en hartverheffende kennis van die Belydenisse by lede van die Protestantse Kerke uitgeslyt. Die gevolg was dat ook die eerste liefde vir dié Belydenisse, wat vroeër selfs nie deur martelaarsbloed uitgeblus kon word nie, baie verkoel het, of geheel en al verdwyn het<sup>425</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1933c: 13).

In a sermon, Van Rooyen also depicts the history of the Heidelberg Catechism in bloody terms (Van Rooyen, 1942a: 4-8). He starts by reflecting on World War II raging at the time, calling it a time of “blood spill and destruction” spreading “misery and sorrow” all over the world and later “a time of worldwide crisis, soul-consuming affliction and anxiety” (5). For Van Rooyen, it is a time in need of “the right kind” of comfort and this he finds in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism originated in a time of “murder, fire and persecution”, during which “streams of blood were flowing”, and “many tears were shed”

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<sup>422</sup> In the early hours of that quiet festival, in the year 1572, the innocent blood of tens of thousands Huguenots ran through the streets of Paris until the Seine River was red, just as years later when the blood of thousands of Zulus coloured the water of the Blood River.

<sup>423</sup> The absence of any reference to the South African War (1899-1902) in all of these “bloody” historical narratives is striking. The only reference Gerdener makes to the war in all six of his articles is just as interesting. He describes the relationship between the “whites”, “coloureds” and “natives” as deeply formed by the Protestant heritage of freedom. In the light of this characteristic gift of freedom, he continues: “Vryheid en nog eens vryheid was deur die jare die wekroep van die wordende Afrikaanse nasie. Die Hugenoot het dit gesoek en dit ryklik hier gekry. Die Voortrekker het dit in die onbekende noorde gaan soek en dit ryklik gekry, veral in die Boererepublieke. En toe daardie vryheid deur die uitslag van die drie-jarige oorlog skynbaar van ’n deel van ons volk ontnem is, het die Albestierende vir ons almal saam in 1910 ’n Verenigde Suid-Afrika gegee wat nou sy weg soek na die plek wat hy in die ry van die volke moet inneem” (Gerdener, 1939g: 162).

<sup>424</sup> “priceless confessions, even endorsed by martyr’s blood”

<sup>425</sup> Unknown, unloved, says the proverb. Gradually, through various circumstances, the deeper and ennobling knowledge of the Confessions became worn out with members of the Protestant Churches. The result was that the first love for these Confessions, which earlier could not even be extinguished by martyr’s blood, also cooled down a lot, or vanished completely.

(4). Protestants, in particular, were badly struck by these events:

Veel verdriet en ellende is deur Protestantse belyders en gelowiges deurgemaak. Die Roomse bewindhebbers het in verskillende lande van Europa hulle bes gedoen om die Protestantse godsdiens en kerke met wortel en tak deur wapengeweld en martelvure uit te roei<sup>426</sup> (4).

But amid the horrors, it was an “epoch-making” period, forming the character of Protestantism:

Vryheid van godsdiens en gewete is op die duur verseker. Stewige en sterke fondamente is vir die Protestantse Kerk en christenheid gelê. Veel is gedoen om ‘n wal op te werp teen die sterke stroom van Roomse dwaalleringe en wanpraktyke<sup>427</sup> (5).<sup>428</sup>

In these accounts, the DRC’s heritage (consisting of Protestantism in general and the Confessions in particular) is defined as one of blood spill, martyrdom and struggle. This had a twofold purpose: first, the DRC’s identity was thereby constructed as beleaguered and besieged. To be a Protestant was to be called to a struggle. Second, these narratives also sanctified Protestant history and the goods constituting that history. The narratives, moreover, included the history of Jan van Riebeeck, the Huguenots and the *Voortrekkers*, and it too was thus sanctified.

#### 4.4.3. “Look unto the rock”

The Confessions were often referred to as the “firm foundations” (GV, 1937a: 6; GV, 1934a: 164; Malan, 1935: 166; GV, 1935d: 101) of the DRC and compared to the steadfastness of a rock (Pastor, 1942: 862-863; Lategan, 1935b: 331; Vorster, 1936: 273). Mentz (1935: 179-180) also refers to the Confessions as “the true cornerstone”. The solidity associated with the Confessions served both as a guarantee of its security and as a call to build on what it has.

However, rock as metaphor is also used in another way with reference to Isaiah 51: 1: “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn”. This metaphor was used not so much with

<sup>426</sup> Much grief and misery was endured by the Protestant confessors and believers. The Roman rulers tried their utmost in different European countries to eradicate Protestant churches root and branch by force of arms and martyr’s fires.

<sup>427</sup> Freedom of religion and conscience is assured in the long run. Firm and strong foundations were laid for the Protestant Church and Christianity. Much was done to cast an embankment against the strong current of Roman heresies and abuses.

<sup>428</sup> The same article was also published in *Die Kerkbode*. See Van Rooyen 1942b: 100-103.

direct reference to the confessions, but as a general call to remember the past.<sup>429</sup> The remembrance of the past was sketched as a necessity for having a future.

In C.R. Kotzé's exposition of Isaiah 51: 1, he states that forgetting the past is sacrilege (Kotzé, 1941: 2071). For him, the past and the future are intimately related "as a tree without roots cannot live, and a *volk* without history cannot exist":

As 'n mens vir jou volk sulke toekoms-ideale koester, dan is dit nodig om te kyk na die volk se verlede – aanskou die rots waar julle uit gekap is<sup>430</sup> (2071).

For Kotzé, "ons rotsverlede"<sup>431</sup> consists of "rotsmanne"<sup>432</sup> – Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Beggars, Huguenots, Jan van Riebeeck<sup>433</sup> and *Voortrekkers* are all listed in this category (2071). Kotzé uses these examples as a way to confront his audience. He asks whether "we are still true children" of these "rotsmanne" and the "rotsverlede".<sup>434</sup>

Kotzé's use of the metaphor supposes a sameness between the past and the present when he asks: "Sal ons nog pas in daardie rots waar ons uitgekap is?"<sup>435</sup> (2072). Kotzé did not only see the present as borne from the past, but in fact as hewn from it. This metaphor is more emphatic than the general idea of being truthful to or worthy of a past. Although it may not be particularly meaningful as one instance in a wide discourse, it is significant if considered in terms of historical understanding: how does the metaphors of memory facilitate and shape historical understanding? From Kotzé's use of it, memory seems to be an exact imprint of the things remembered (like a stamp leaving an exact replica of itself in wax). The past, for Kotzé, seems to be a mould that forms us, and upholding a tradition or a heritage means to fit that very mould.

In 1949, this metaphor is used in a similar way but with slightly different implications. It provides a long list of people who constitute "the rock". Moreover, it carries the undertone that faithfully "looking unto the rock" may qualify one for being seen as part

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<sup>429</sup> The publication in the *Kerk en Volk* series that dealt with history is also titled *Aanskou die Rots* (Du Toit, 1951).

<sup>430</sup> If one cherishes such future ideals for one's nation, then it is necessary to consider the nation's past – look onto the rock from which you were cut.

<sup>431</sup> "our rock past"

<sup>432</sup> "rock men"

<sup>433</sup> Another prominent appropriation of this text is found on the cover of a number of *Die Kerkbode* in April 1960 that coincided with the annual celebration of Van Riebeeck Day. A photo of the statue of Van Riebeeck in Cape Town was featured on the cover of *Die Kerkbode*, with a quotation of Isaiah 51:1 next to it: "Aanskou die rots waaruit julle gekap is." See *Die Kerkbode* 1960, 85(14).

<sup>434</sup> "rock past"

<sup>435</sup> "Will we still fit into that rock from which we were cut?"

of this rock in the future:

En ons moet ook veral in hierdie jaar, veral by die nuwe monument, terugkyk na die Geuse, eerstens, wat 80 jaar geveg het vir die vryheid van hul Protestantse godsdienst; ons moet ook terugkyk na die *Hugenote* wat alles opgeoffer het vir hul Protestantse geloof, wat hul dierbares sien sterf het op die brandstapels, wat deur Gods genade hul weg kon vind na Suid-Afrika. Ons moet ook terugkyk na die *Voortrekkers* tussen die miljoene barbare, waar hulle sulke groepe vorm net met Bybel en geweer. Daarby kom die helde en heldinne op slagvelde en in konsentrasiekampe met die Vryheidsoorloë. Ons moet ook terugkyk na die *Helpmekaarmense* wat soos helde en heldinne na die Rebelle van 1914 omtrent dag en nag gewerk het met kollektelyste en by basaartafels van Februarie 1915 tot by die klimaks 9 November 1917 om byna 'n halfmiljoen pond skulde te betaal, sodat meer dan 1200 families nie na die armlankedom gedrywe is nie. Daar is o.m. die rots waaruit ons gekap is ... Hoeveel het ons nog van die Geus, Hugenoot, Voortrekker en ander se rotsvaste geloof? Hoeveel het ons nog van die voorouers se Bybelkennis en huisgodsdienst? Hoeveel het ons van die voorouers se liefde en agting vir Kerk en sakramente? ... By al die feesvierings en geesdrif moet ons dink aan herstel en weer-opbou van ons Afrikanerdom! Sodat die nageslag ook vir ons monumente sal bou soos ons nou vir ons voorgeslag bou.<sup>436</sup> (Uit die Vrystaat, 1949a: 884-885).

In these examples, heritage is seen as a source of stability, orientation and direction, but also of confrontation. The call to “look unto the rock” serves as a general appeal to remember the past, but an interconnectedness between past and future is also assumed. The memory of the past is seen as necessary for securing the future. In that sense, we can say, the DRC saw itself as hewn and borne from its past. Moreover, the biblical foundation

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<sup>436</sup> And we should also especially in this year, especially at the new monument, look back at the Protestants, firstly, who fought for 80 years for the freedom of their Protestant religion; we should also look back at the Huguenots who sacrificed everything for their Protestant faith, who saw their loved ones die on pyres, who found their way to South Africa by the grace of God. We should also look back the *Voortrekkers* amongst the millions of barbarians, where they formed such groups only with Bible and rifle. To this are added the heroes and heroines on battlefields and in concentration camps with the Liberation Wars. We should also look back at the *Helpmekaar* people who basically worked day and night like heroes and heroines after the Rebellion of 1914 with a collection list and at bazaar tables from February 1915 until the climax on 9 November 1917 to pay almost half a million pounds in debt, so that more than 1200 families were not forced into the poor-white life. There is i.a. the rock from which we were cut ...

How much do we still have of the Protestant, Huguenot, Voortrekker and other's rock-solid faith? How much do we still have of the ancestors' Bible knowledge and family devotions? How much do we have of our ancestors' love and regard for Church and sacraments? ... With all the festivities and enthusiasm, we should think about again restoring our Afrikanerdom!

So that the descendants will build monuments for us like we now do for our ancestors.

of this call gave it a religious tone. Forgetting the past was seen as sacrilege and a sure way to expend the future.

#### 4.4.4. *Naboth's vineyard*

The story of Naboth's vineyard from 1 Kings 21 was often used to reflect on the concept heritage. According to the story, Naboth owned a vineyard and it seems to have been his only possession. His plot lay close to the palace of King Ahab who wished to acquire it. However, Naboth's vineyard was an inheritance and according to Jewish law he could not alienate it. Therefore, he refused to sell it to the king. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, plotted against Naboth and had him killed for not wanting to sell his land.

Looking at the different ways in which this text was appropriated in relation to heritage reveals a whole array of meanings attributed to heritage.

In 1935, E.E. van Rooyen refers to the story of Naboth and Ahab in an article entitled "Die gevare waardeur ons erfenis bedreig word"<sup>437</sup> (1935b: 173-176). He underscores the extent to which heritages are generally being threatened at the time and distinguishes between material and spiritual heritage (173). For him, spiritual heritage clearly takes priority over the material and his definition of the spiritual heritage at stake is unambiguous: "die besondere en verhewe Gods openbaring en die kostelike en selfs met martelaarsbloed beseënde Belydenisskrifte daarop gegrond"<sup>438</sup> (173). These are the things that constitute Naboth's vineyard for Van Rooyen.

The threats, too, are precisely spelt out by Van Rooyen: 1) the danger of indifference ("om koud en onaandoenlik daarteenoor te staan"; "die gees van onverskilligheid is soos 'n kruipende beroerte")<sup>439</sup> (173); 2) the danger of ignorance and aversion ("onkunde: die onkunde grawe hoe langer hoe meer 'n breë en diepe kloof tussen ons en ons heerlike erfenis"; "'n tyd van onverhole teensin en afkeer van die Belydenisskrifte")<sup>440</sup> (174); 3) the danger of watering down and mutilating the heritage ("doelbewuste verminking") (175); and 4) the danger of disbelief and misbelief (173-176). These dangers are called "Ahab's" (176) and Van Rooyen calls on his readers to resist it:

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<sup>437</sup> "the dangers that threaten our heritage"

<sup>438</sup> "the remarkable and elevated revelation of God and priceless confessions, even endorsed by martyr's blood, based on it"

<sup>439</sup> "to stand cold and indifferent toward it"; "the spirit of recklessness is like a stalking stroke"

<sup>440</sup> "ignorance: the ignorance digs more and more a broad and deep fissure between us and our wonderful heritage"; "a time of open resistance to and rejection of the Confessions"

Ons moet die taal van Nabot steeds op besliste wyse teenoor hierdie geestelike Agabs laat weerklink: ‘Mag die Here ons daarvoor bewaar dat ons die erfdeel van ons vaders aan julle sal gee.’ En as dit nodig is, dan te stry vir die erfenis. Ja die volle wapenrusting in Ef. 6:10-20 beskrywe aan te doen en te stry vir die geloof wat, soos die apostel Judas sê, *eenmaal aan die heiliges oorgelewer is* ... Met papheid en toegeeflikheid teenoor die genoemde moderne Agabs sal ons niks positiefs as wins behaal nie, maar intendeel moet aanskou hoe daardie doelbewuste Agabs terrein op ons verower en ons ons erfenis stuk vir stuk ontnem en ons *geestelik mierarm laat word*<sup>441</sup> (176).

In two other appropriations of the text, the trauma of urbanisation for Afrikaners comes to the fore. A 1939 sermon by T.C. de Villiers serves as the first example (1939: 244-247). De Villiers constructs a historical narrative that connects Naboth to the *Voortrekkers*. He calls Naboth a martyr among other martyrs “who died for God and fatherland” (244). Nine-hundred years after him, De Villiers continues, Jesus Christ struggled for “*volk en vaderland*”<sup>442</sup> and his “martyr’s blood flowed for *volk en vaderland* and for the whole world (244). De Villiers’s next group of martyrs come “eighteen hundred years later”, the *Voortrekkers*. The *Voortrekkers*’ leader of the time, Piet Retief, negotiated a land treaty with the Zulu king, Dingane. In February 1938, however, Dingane betrayed the treaty by inviting Retief and his party to a special performance by his soldiers. Dingane then ordered his soldiers to capture and kill Retief and his party. This event gave rise to the Battle of Blood River that was fought on 16 December 1938. De Villiers remembers the killing of Retief as follows:

... 64 manne [het] opgetrek en gestaan voor ’n koning. Dit was ’n heiden, ’n wrede koning. Hulle het gestaan vir reg, hulle het getuig vir die Christendom. Maar hulle is ook deur hulle vyande buite die dorp gesleep en op ’n ander Golgota het Piet Retief en sy helde buite Dingaanstat hul bloed laat vloei vir volk en vaderland<sup>443</sup> (244).

De Villiers continues by stating that there is an “age-old temptation” that still confronts people: the temptation to trade one’s most precious possession for something inferior (244). For him, the first “most precious possession” is “the land for which the

<sup>441</sup> We should let the Naboth’s language resound with conviction against these spiritual Ahabs: ‘May the Lord protect us so that we can give you the inheritance of our fathers.’ And if it is necessary, fight for the heritage. Yes, the complete armour described in Eph. 6:10-20 taken up and fight for the faith that, as the apostle Judas said, was once passed down by the saints ... With spinelessness and lenity toward the mentioned Ahabs we will not acquire any positive profit, but, in contrast, see how those deliberate Ahabs gain ground on us and deprive us of our heritage and let us become spiritually destitute.

<sup>442</sup> “nation and fatherland”

<sup>443</sup> ... 64 men gathered and stood before a king. It was a heathen, a cruel king. They stood for what was right, they testified for the Christendom. But they were also dragged to outside town and on another Calvary Piet Retief and his heroes let their blood flow for nation and fatherland.

*Voortrekkers suffered and died”:*

[Dit] word nou aan ’n vreemdeling verruil vir ’n bietjie geld, soms vir ’n bietjie drank! Hul vaders het die grond as skat opgepas en gewaardeer. Hulle minag daardie kosbare erfenis, en hy wat daardie erfenis verruil gaan so dikwels agteruit. Insteede van selfstandig te wees moet hy ander gaan soebat vir werk of ’n stukkie kos. Hul kinders verloor hul selfstandigheidsgevoel. Hulle word houthakkers en waterdraers. Hulle beland in die agterbuurtes van die stede, ongelukkig, moedeloos. Hoe vele duisende Afrikaners se afdraande pad het begin die dag toe hulle die grond van hul vaders aan ’n vreemdeling gegee het (245).

God taught Israel and Naboth and his fathers, he writes, that land is holy. Naboth is someone who knew and obeyed God’s law, and he was willing to suffer and die for it (245).

As ieder Afrikaner die gees van Nabot sou openbaar, sou daar vandag nie gewees het die duisende van ons volk wat agteruitgegaan het, die lewenstryd verloor en moedeloos geword het nie! Hoe nodig dat die Afrikaners ook die grond van hul vaders sal beskou en alles doen om dit vir hulself en hul nageslagte te bewaar! Hoe nodig vandag die heldemoed van Nabot!<sup>444</sup> (245).

The second precious possession that De Villiers sees carelessly exchanged is family life. Family life is attacked at its heart, he says, by those who ask “why should one have children?” “Developed Afrikaners” see family as a burden and this outlook weakens the *volk* spiritually and physically. Because of it, the heritage of “true femininity and motherliness” is degenerating (245).

Furthermore, De Villiers also holds that the heritage of family worship and the heritage of one’s church is in danger (245). This implies, once again, that the heritage of the fathers is being haggled:

Dit help niks om te praat en te sing van ons Voortrekkerhelde nie, dit help niks om ons Voortrekkerfeeste te vier nie as ons nie saam met die Voortrekkers op hul geestelike Trek wil gaan in die week en op Sondag nie. Hierdie feeste sal bitter min beteken as ons nie teruggaan na die godsdiens en Kerk van ons voorvaders nie. As ons die erfenis van ons godsdiens en Kerk minag en verwaarloos, sal ons ten spyte van hierdie feeste agteruit gaan en ’n

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<sup>444</sup> If every Afrikaner were to reveal the spirit of Naboth, the thousands of our nation who fell into decline, lost the struggle of life and became destitute would never have fallen into decline! How crucial that Afrikaners should also look onto the land of their fathers and do everything to preserve it for themselves and their descendants! How crucial today the heroism of Naboth!



derderangse volk word!... Gaan ons ook voortaan die prys betaal vir ons godsdiens, vir ons volk? Of gaan ons net praat en sing van dappere voorouers? Dit sal dan net spotterny en bedrog wees! Dan sal hierdie fees ons nie tot seën, maar tot 'n vloek, 'n veroordeling wees!<sup>445</sup> (245-246).

De Villiers concludes by confronting his readers with two roads: the easy and the difficult. The easy road is sketched as one that asks no self-sacrifices, one that is all about the self, one that allows the trading of the heritage, and one where no fight is acquired and no wounds suffered. But the difficult road has a cross to bear, which includes self-sacrifice, concern about posterity, a fight against enemies and the suffering of wounds. De Villiers leaves his readers to decide whether they want to take the path of the coward, or that of Naboth, Jesus and the *Voortrekkers* (246).

It is clear that De Villiers saw urbanisation and its effects on Afrikaners as a result of them abandoning their heritage. Leaving their farms and the known way of life is for him a result of a lack of courage and perseverance amid difficulties. Naboth, Christ and the *Voortrekkers* suffered much for them to be the heirs of such a heritage, and he is of the opinion that they should have more backbone. Singing the praises of heroes was not enough, he argued. One also had to follow in their footsteps.

A second appropriation of Naboth's vineyard that focuses on urbanisation came from S.A. Fourie in 1947. Fourie's reflection on heritage relates to a variety of texts, among which is 1 Kings 21. He distinguishes between two types of heritage: spiritual, on the one hand, and material or cultural, on the other. Although he finds comfort in the fact that spiritual heritage is something that even the poor can possess and pass on to their children (1947: 308), his biggest concern is with material and cultural heritage.

He writes about the loss of land by farmers in intensely emotional terms and appeals to others "to cling to it" because it is "holy ground, and the place where our crib stood" (308). In cases where it is inevitable that land will be lost, he writes, everything should be done to prevent that it lands "in *volksvreemde* hande"<sup>446</sup> (308).

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<sup>445</sup> It helps nothing to talk and sing about our Voortrekker heroes, it helps nothing to celebrate Voortrekker festivals if we are not willing to accompany the *Voortrekkers* on their spiritual trek in the week and on Sunday. These festivals will mean very little if we do not return to our ancestors' religion and Church. If we disregard and neglect our religion and our Church, we will, regardless of these festivals, fall into decline and become a third-rate nation! ... Will we also pay the price for our religion, for our nation in future? Or will we just talk and sing about brave ancestors? It will then just be mockery and fraud! This festival will then not be a blessing, but a curse, a condemnation!

<sup>446</sup> "in alien hands"

In equally emotional terms, he writes about historical places and church buildings. The land, “bought with blood and tears”, is rich with historical memories, he writes.<sup>447</sup> “Afsonderlike plekkies waar bv. iemand gesneeu het of ’n onmisbare gewoon en gesterf het ...”<sup>448</sup> (308). “These things serve as a voice from the past,” he holds, “and a finger that points to the task of the future” (308). Monuments, still unmarked places, valuable documents, and historical portraits all form part of what Fourie regards as “costly heritage” (308). Moreover, even the inspiration (“besieling”) that these things exude is for him part of the heritage of the entire *volk*.

A last reflection on 1 Kings 21 that we will consider is a sermon on Reformation day of 1945 by P.W. Jordaan (Jordaan, 1945: 404-405). The sermon is split into three sections: the origins and esteem of the heritage, the dangers threatening the heritage, and the obligation with regard to the heritage.

According to Jordaan, Naboth was called to uphold his heritage for the sake of asserting his tribal identity (“stamverband”) (404). He had a duty towards his family (404). It was a gift of God that he saw as “holy and untouchable” (404). The Protestant heritage is then said to be equally sublime<sup>449</sup> and constituted by the Reformed Confessions drawn from the infallible Word of God (404). This is the very heritage received from “our fathers” and for which they have suffered: “Daarvoor het hulle goed en bloed, tuiste en vaderland opgeoffer”<sup>450</sup> (404). Moreover, the heritage have “pristinely” been handed down by them (404). But if the heritage were to fall in the hands of the enemy, a “half-breed generation of half heathens will be the end result” (404). They will be “spiritually blinded, superstitious, without future, without culture, without genuine religion and morals” (404). If the heritage is not safeguarded, the progeny of the DRC will have no “noble vineyard, but a hodgepodge vegetable patch” (404).

The way in which Naboth’s vineyard was his “intimately personal possession” to which he “clung” is set before the readers as an example (405). They have the duty to claim

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<sup>447</sup> “... so ondervind menige gelowige op een of ander tyd in sy lewe ook ’n brandende begeerte om terug te gaan na daardie plekkies waar hy as kind gespeel het, as jongmens vir die eerste keer vaste grond onder sy voete gevoel het en as volwassene in die stryd van die lewe gestaan het. Dikwels is die plekkie juis die kerk van sy vaders, waar hy gedoop, aangeneem en getroud is. Dit is ook die plek vanwaar sy dierbare ouers begrawe is en waar hy sy Skepper leer ken en bemin het. Vir hom is dit die huis van sy Vader en die voorportaal van die hemel. Groot is sy vreugde as hy terugkom na lang omswerwing en alles nog net so vind” (308).

<sup>448</sup> “Separate little places where, e.g., someone died in battle or an indispensable lived and died ...”

<sup>449</sup> “Waarlik, ’n skoner erfenis met ’n meer gesaghebbende toesegging en verheerlikte herkoms is nie denkbaar nie” (Jordaan, 1945: 404).

<sup>450</sup> “For that they sacrificed good and blood, home and fatherland”

ownership of their heritage, so that it becomes an inalienable inheritance. Like Naboth's vineyard, their heritage should become the very "expression of their personality" (405). Jordaan sketches the heritage as something that should be worked in and pruned, and should therefore also be able to become dilapidated, unfruitful, a wilderness and ruin (405). Believers are called to ensure that a spotless and unblemished – a pure – heritage is handed down to their children (405).

In these examples, heritage is seen as something that needs to be protected like Naboth protected his vineyard. This is specifically seen as the Confessions, but also things that were seen to be unique to Afrikaners' lives: farms, rural life, church life and a perception of "true femininity and motherliness," ground and *stamverband*. All of these things were felt to be vulnerable and in need of protection. This understanding of heritage was also connected to the future. To waste it was to waste and potentially lose one's future.

#### 4.4.5. *A spiritual weapon and bulwark*

Heritage was also depicted as an apt mechanism of defence. This association applied to the Protestant heritage in general, and Confessions specifically. In a time characterised as one of rapid decline and corruption, "spiritual weapons" were said to be a necessity.

Gerdener, for example, held that two things were necessary given the times: knowing one's enemy and "the ability to handle one's own weapons" (1939a: 1076). "Protestant" listed the following things as suitable "spiritual weapons": "a spiritual awakening" through the spread of knowledge about the Reformation and its blessings, the distribution of Bibles, and especially "die wapen van worstelgebed"<sup>451</sup> (934). What is needed above all, he writes, is a "powerful revival of the Protestant churches", "powerful Spirit-led preaching of the gospel and the truths of God's Word", and "the spirit of solidarity and cooperation" (Protestant, 1939b: 934-935).

Ben Marais, too, calls upon believers to "take up arms" against "all possible attacks" in defence of their Protestant heritage before it is too late (Marais, 1939: 537) and underscores that everyone has a part to play in this fight that also takes place "in our own hearts and our own circle" (537).

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there were a multitude of things said to

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<sup>451</sup> "the weapon of wrestling-prayer"

be threatening the DRC. These were largely depicted as endangering the heart of the DRC, i.e. that which it held dearest. The dangers were vividly described as enemies threatening to penetrate the churchly “erf” (yard) (GV, 1936b: 99)<sup>452</sup> or the “bosom of our confessional church” (Lategan, 1934: 333; Anonymous, 1933a: 70; Malan, 1935: 167), and putting the “kosbare erfgoed ons deur die vrome vaders<sup>453</sup> nagelaat”<sup>454</sup> at risk (GV, 1936b: 99).

In order to resist the dangers, the church relied on the Confessions. It had to be ensured “dat ons kerkmense goed gewapen [is]”<sup>455</sup> (GV, 1936b: 99) with knowledge of the reformed confessions (99).

The depiction of Confessions as spiritual weapons is supplemented by the idea that it should be erected as a “bulwark” against the perilous worldviews of the time (GV, 1934a: 165; OP, 1926: 5). Gerdener sees the Word of God and the Confessions as the “delicious fruit” of the Reformation that has time and again been the “bulwark of truth” fending off assaults with the result that the “banners of communal Confessions have united and braced hearts for the struggle” (Gerdener, 1939f: 117).

Van Rooyen specifically points to the Heidelberg Catechism as an apt weapon (Van Rooyen, 1942c: 34-36). He advocates for more preaching of the Catechism by drawing on military strategy as an example. When two armies approach each other, he writes, there

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<sup>452</sup> The Afrikaans word “erf” is used in a striking way, referring to both its meanings in one sentence – yard and heritage. “Daar is immers so baie modernistiese en sektariese rigtinge en strominge wat dreig om ons kerklike erf binne te dring, dat ons kerkmense goed gewapend moet word, ten einde die aanvalle op suksesvolle wyse te kan afweer, en in besit te kan bly van die kosbare erfgoed ons deur die vrome vaders nagelaat” (GV, 1936b: 99).

<sup>453</sup> The prominence of the concept “vaders” in these texts should not be overlooked. In his introduction to the section on “Vaders” in the book *Het Gereformeerde Geheugen* (2009), Herman Paul argues that in Dutch Reformed memory this concept functions as a proper noun and also as, what he calls, a function name (*functienaam*). For groups using “vaders” as a proper name, it would refer to a very specific set of figures (for example, Kuiper would use it to refer to the Dordtse vaderen), and this would vary from group to group. “Vader” as function name, however, shows the extent to which reformed Protestants “waren gehecht aan een historische verankering van hun ideeën en gebruiken” (Paul, 2009: 36), and its use creates and implies a duty or obligation: “‘Op degene die iemand tot zijn oudvader benoemt, rust de plicht de erfenis van de vader te bewaren.’ Maar dit bewaren ... viel met allerlei posities in het spectrum tussen conservatisme en progressivisme te verenigen” (36). Paul continues to also explain the continuity and authority that is implied with the use of this function name: “Het beroep op een vader creëert continuïteit in de geschiedenis en geeft, zolang de vader behoort tot een gezaghebbende canon, autoriteit aan de opvattingen of praktijken die men de vader toeschrijft. Daarbij kan men zich afvragen of het gezag van de vader niet vooral moest afstralen op de zonen (en dochters, voor zover van toepassing). De vadermetafoor voorziet de zonen immers van een gezaghebbende oorsprong” (36).

<sup>454</sup> “valuable inheritance left to us by the pious fathers”

<sup>455</sup> “that our church people are armed”

are two tasks that are of great importance: invading and conquering territory, and then consolidating and strengthening the territory with forts and battlements (34). For Van Rooyen, history and experience show that the “Christian Church on earth is a fighting (“strydende”) Church”, and the “true Church is the *spiritual* fighting force (“strydmag”) of God on earth” (34).<sup>456</sup> For this, the church has “spiritual weapons” both to attack and to defend. Moreover, the conquered territory is the established church on earth, and it has the task of strengthening itself in protection against the attacks of Satan. The best weapon for this, according to Van Rooyen, is the “sword of the Spirit” – and this is, eminently, the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism (34).

Given the importance that heritage and history gained, it is notable that an article by T.N. Hanekom promoting the Archives Yearbook of South African History (published from 1938), carries the subtitle “an arsenal for our fatherland history” (Hanekom, 1947: 986-987). Hanekom underscores the importance of history for the development of a *volk*, and urges the DRC to learn from the example and also take proper care of its own archival material. It is significant that Hanekom also points to the relevance of some historical studies for contemporary problems, specifically the question of race and poverty (986-987). He views the Yearbook as “‘n lewende, bevruggende faktor in ons intellektuele en kulturele lewe”<sup>457</sup> (987).

In these examples heritage acquires another characteristic: it is not only something that should be treasured and protected, but it is also something that *can protect* – an apt weapon of defense.

#### 4.6. A heritage to build on

In the 1930s and 1940s, the DRC played an important part in addressing the pressing social issues of the Afrikaners. In the previous sections of this chapter, the DRC’s self-definition and understanding of the *zeitgeist* have been discussed. We have also identified heritage as an anchoring concept in the DRC’s identity.

This final section considers the DRC’s understanding of its own calling and the resources they drew on in order to fulfil this calling. We will see in more detail how the DRC

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<sup>456</sup> “Haar moeilike maar heerlike taak is om teen die magte van Satan en sonde op te trek. Sy moet terrein verower. Sy het dit ook deur die eeue heen tot op die huidige dag gedoen. Met geestelike wapens is dit gedoen. Wapens van aanval sowel as verdediging ... Maar as die terrein verower is moet dit ook gekonsolideer of verstewig word. Want Satan en sy bese magte is voortdurend daarop uit om verlore terrein weer te herwin. Die verowerde terrein is die gevestigde Kerk op aarde” (Van Rooyen, 1942c: 34).

<sup>457</sup> “a living, nourishing factor in our intellectual and cultural life”

connected the past and the future – how its understanding of its heritage harnessed its sense of calling.

Apart from the bravery, pugnacity, and loyalty of the “fathers” continuously highlighted in the previous sections, here their *actions* are also emphasised. It becomes clear that loyalty to the heritage is also understood as a call to concrete action.

#### 4.6.1. “*Koers in die krisis*”<sup>458</sup>

The DRC’s heritage became a valuable resource for it to face up to the crises at hand. As we have seen, the heritage included the Confessions, but also numerous other things.

A prominent example of how the heritage was harnessed to gird the DRC for the current crises is the series of publications by the *Federasie van die Calvinistiese Studenteverenigings in Suid-Afrika* (Federation of the Calvinist Student Organisations of South Africa) between 1935 and 1941, titled *Koers in die Krisis*. Although this Federation and publication did not emerge only from the DRC, prominent DRC members served on its board and also contributed to the series. The various publications were enthusiastically announced in *Die Kerkbode* and *Gereformeerde Vaandel*. Van Rooyen praised it for introducing Calvinism and its many “penwortelsgedagtes en rigsgnoere vir elke terrein van die lewe”<sup>459</sup> (Van Rooyen, 1941: 163) anew, and for its “depth, clarity and unyielding position” (164). It was to be a “bulwark against the corrupt proliferation” of the time, and ideally had to flow from “the sheltering corners of our hearts as a crystal clear stream, not only to water the field of the church and religious life, *but further*”<sup>460</sup> (163).

From the foreword of the first volume of *Koers in die Krisis*, it is clear that the “heritage of the fathers” was, above all, seen as the answer to the contemporary perplexed situation. The aim of the series is “om die groot geestesrigting wat ons van ons vaders geërf het te huldig en hoog te hou”<sup>461</sup> (Kestell, 1935; 1940; 1941: iii) and to help prevent that “our *volk* becomes unhinged from the costly heritage handed down by the ancestors” (iii). Kestell also quotes the Catechism as affirmation of the solid and unshakable nature of this heritage as said to be expressed in the belief that God is sovereign (iii-v).

The sovereignty of God (as a central theme of Calvinism) was an important aspect of the heritage claimed. It provided a necessary security (“Dié Godsvertroue staan vas, of dit

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<sup>458</sup> “Direction in the crisis”

<sup>459</sup> “taproot thoughts and guidelines for every terrain of life”

<sup>460</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>461</sup> “to honour and live up to the big spiritual direction that we inherited from our fathers”

golfies is wat saggies teen die rots kabbel, en of dit skuimende branders is wat daarteen slaan.”<sup>462</sup>) (Kestell, 1941: v), and also affirmation that the will of God prevails (“Hierdie geloofsvertroue gee hom die versekerdheid dat alles uit God is, deur Hom, tot Hom...”<sup>463</sup>) (Kestell, v). This led to concrete abilities for believers, one can say:

Die uitwerking van hierdie Godvertroue is dat die gelowige krag ontvang om alle lyding te dra, elke stryd te stry, elke taak te volbring. Hy kan ook opstaan tot kragtige daade ... So het dit gebeur dat Calviniste by uitstek manne van krag, manne van die daad gewees het. Ons dink aan die Hervormers, aan die Helde van die Tagtigjarige Oorlog, aan ons eie Voortrekkers. Manne van aksie was hulle ... Waar dit swakkelinge betref sonder wilskrag en werkkrag, onder manne van Calvinistiese opvatting moet ons hulle nie soek nie<sup>464</sup> (v-vi).

More knowledge of the heritage is therefore encouraged, as it would enable believers to “erect a wall” against the “*volksvreemde*” currents dragging us along” (Stoker & Potgieter, 1935: vii). It would also serve “organised action” to “free our *volk* from the exile of modernism, liberalism, humanism, evolutionism” (vii), and to take up its “spiritual weapons” (vii). This was a calling that went beyond the borders of the church to all terrains of human activity and life. It included “education, upbringing, science, politics, morality, art, the judiciary, commerce, industry, family and the societal” (Stoker & Vorster, 1941: vii). And this calling was depicted as a struggle:

Ons is geroepe om ’n *stryd* soos nog nooit te vore nie aan te bind teen die vyande van die Christelike geloof en om Suid-Afrika in al sy kringe op te eis vir die eer van God<sup>465</sup> (Stoker & Potgieter, 1935: ix).

A significant difference between the definition of the confessional church (as discussed in 4.3.2.) and that of Calvinism is the insistence that the Calvinist position is not a “rigid, hardened system like all those systems that deify the temporal” (X) but in is fact “rich in the undiscovered and unprecedented possibilities of development and progress” (X). Calvinist principles are expressly said to *not* be universal but are continuously developed

<sup>462</sup> This trust in God is steadfast, whether it is little waves poppling softly against the rock, or whether it is foaming waves crashing into it.

<sup>463</sup> “This trusting faith gives him the assurance that everything is from God, through Him, unto Him...”

<sup>464</sup> The effect of this trust in God is that the believer receives the strength to bear all suffering, fight every battle, accomplish every task. He can also rise to powerful actions ... So it happened that the Calvinists were by default men of strength, men of action. We think of the Reformers, of the Heroes of the Eighty Years’ War, of our own *Voortrekkers*. They were men of action ... We should not search for weaklings without drive among the men of Calvinist belief.

<sup>465</sup> We are called to a battle like no other before against the enemies of the Christian faith and to claim South Africa in all its realms for the honour of God.



and discovered. The “principle of segregation” is explicitly named as an example of a principle which is “through and through Calvinistic” and which had to be “discovered” in the unique South African circumstances (ix-x).

Gerdener gave a striking exposition of what it would mean to apply “our principles” to the “new circumstances and conditions” (Gerdener, 1943: 354). Gerdener warned against utopias and hypotheses and stated that there are a lot of unknown and uncertain things. However, he also held that there are some known and certain things “en by hulle moet ons sonder versuim ons beginsels en geloof inskakel”<sup>466</sup> (354). For Gerdener, idealism should meet hard reality, and people must be willing to enforce their convictions:

Ons idealisme moet ook die harde werklikheid bereik. Laat ons die volgende as voorbeeld noem: ’n Boer op sy plaas of ’n ambagsman op ’n dorp is ’n voorstander van 100 persent segregasie, dog hy weier om af te sien van nie-blanke werksvolk. Om konsekwent te wees, moet sulke persone sonder versuim blanke arbeid begin gebruik en die daad by die woord sit, wat segregasie betref. Dit is tog reeds ons land se verklaarde beleid dog dit is juis die gebrekkige toepassing van die beginsel in die alledaagse lewe wat die uitvoer van die beleid bemoeilik. Elke dag langer wat ons eis dat die nie-blanke by ons in diens sal kom, vloei die stroom van naturelle na die blanke werkkringe oor en word die ideaal van 100 persent segregasie teengehou. Aan die ander kant, as ons die ideaal voorstaan van spontane segregasie deur die skepping van fasiliteite in eie gebiede en ’n deel van die naturellebevolking vir ekonomiese doeleindes in ons middel wil behou, moet ons ook dadelik begin. Laat die Kerk en elke getroue lidmaat daarvan dan ywer vir beter behuising in aparte woonbuurte, bestaanbare lone, beter gesondheidsdiens, onderwys en evangelisasie van die duisende oor wie ons onself as voogde beskou. Op die oomblik is ons nog te seer geneig om andersdenkendes te veroordeel, uit die verte allerlei skemas te bespreek en te min in die daaglikse lewe te doen om ons ideale uit te lewe en toe te pas. Hier veral moet realisme en idealisme gelyk tred hou met mekaar<sup>467</sup> (355).

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<sup>466</sup> “and we should join our principles and beliefs without delay”

<sup>467</sup> Our idealism should also speak to the harsh reality. Let us mention the following as example: A farmer on his farm or an artisan in a town is an advocate for 100% segregation, although he refuses to abandon non-white workers. To be consistent, every person should without neglect start using white labour and walk the talk, regarding segregation. It is indeed our country’s declared policy, but it is the inadequate application of the principle in everyday life that complicates the execution of the policy. Every additional day that we demand that the non-white should be in our service, the current of natives flows to the white labour circle and the ideal of 100% segregation is prevented. On the other hand, if we advocate the ideal of spontaneous segregation through the creation of facilities in the races’ own areas and keep a part of the native population for economic purposes in our midst, we should also start immediately. Let the Church and its every loyal member then strive with ardour for improved housing in separate neighbourhoods, viable wages, improved healthcare, education and evangelism of the thousands over whom we consider ourselves

*Koers in die Krisis* explicitly set out to help so-called Calvinists in South Africa discover their calling. The calling and the duty to discover it are described in language of domination, creation, reformation, control, and remodelling. The Calvinist sense of calling was said to be the source of its idealism, sober realism and “dadekrag”<sup>468</sup>. Based on their faith, they were said to be warriors for the honour of God, and this gave their lives exalted meaning:

“En hierdie lewe se roeping is hier op aarde om die aarde te onderwerp, tot groter heerlikheid te ontplooi deur kultuur te skep. Dit beteken dat die Calvinis geen wêreldontvlugting wil hê nie, maar wêreldhervorming beoog; dat hy weier om alles maar sy loop te laat loop, en weier om hom aan te pas, maar beheersing en omvorming van alles wat verkeerd loop onderneem. Hierdie roepingsin gee aan die Calvinis tegelyk sy heerlike idealisme, sy nugtere werklikheidsin en sy dadekrag. Hy is, kragtens sy geloof, stryder vir en om die eer van God op aarde. Dit gee sy lewe ’n verhewe sin en maak dit vir hom die moeite werd om te lewe. Dit verlaag hom nie tot fatalis nie, maar maak hom tot medestryder Gods op aarde ... Maar roepingsvervulling vereis roepingsbewustheid. En dit is die doel van hierdie onderneming ... om ons volk in alle lewensfere te help roepingsbewus te maak en koers te help wys in die verwarrende veelheid van vraagstukke, wat hom oormeester en sy hande slap maak ...”<sup>469</sup> (Stoker & Potgieter, 1935: x).

#### 4.6.2. *Spiritual reconstruction*

An important aspect of the DRC’s understanding of its calling was the extent to which it was seen to be based on its faith and heritage. Faith and heritage were the resources and the vision that guided their calling to build. The continuous call to remember and savour

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as guardians. At the moment, we are still too inclined to judge those who think differently from us, discuss all sorts of schemes from afar and to do too little in everyday life to live out and apply our ideals. Especially here, realism and idealism should keep up with each other.

<sup>468</sup> “strength of action”

<sup>469</sup> “And this life’s calling is here on earth to subject the earth, to reveal bigger glory by creating culture. This means that the Calvinist wants not escape from the world, but aims for world reformation; that he refuses to just let everything run their course, and refuses to adjust himself, but instead take control of and shape everything that is on the wrong track. This sense of calling provides the Calvinist simultaneously with his glorious idealism, his well-balanced sense of reality, and his strength of action. He is, through his faith, fighter for and about the honour of God on earth. It gives his life exalted meaning and makes it worthwhile for him to live. It does not reduce him to fatalist, but makes him co-fighter with God on earth ... But to fulfil a calling one needs to be aware of a calling. And this is the aim of this concern ... to assist our nation in all spheres of life to become aware of calling and to assist in showing direction in the confusing amount of problems, which are master over him and make his hands limp ...”

the heritage was therefore an important substructure of the DRC's actions. The past, present and future became intimately and directly connected.

For "Pastor", all reconstruction should be based on Christ. In order to do so, the "spiritual heritages [would have to] be preserved and protected against destruction" (Pastor, 1942: 862-863). He points to the Heidelberg Catechism as such a spiritual heritage, and quotes questions and answers 27 and 28 as providing the "threefold rock-foundation" on which to build. This foundation, Pastor argues, can bring the "wankelende geloof van die ontstelde menslike hart tot rus"<sup>470</sup> (862).

B.B. Keet, G.B.A. Gerdener and E.E. van Rooyen also wrote on the topic, with Keet and Van Rooyen explicitly stating that the church should not speak about "reconstruction" but of "revival", "renewal" or "reformation" emphasising the spiritual nature of the crisis (Van Rooyen, 1945a: 622; Keet, 1945b: 466). Keet emphasises that using "that old word", "revival", is a reminder that the task is not a human one, but that of the "life-creating Spirit of God" (466). He also describes the task at hand in terms of a "renewal of the covenant" (466), emphasising that "it is *we* (original emphasis) that have to *return* (my emphasis) after our unfaithfulness" to the unchanging covenant of the unchanging God (466).

This need for revival, renewal or, then, *return* is sketched by Keet as urgent, given that "it is generally accepted that the world has its last chance now" (Keet, 1945b: 467). "My broeders, ons belewe laaste dae",<sup>471</sup> he writes later (468). If the "human spirit" does not "radically change", the "world as we know it faces destruction" (467). The church, therefore, stands before an "inestimable" and "singular" opportunity, and a "God-given moment" to testify about the "everlasting things" that "cannot be destroyed by any force in the world" (467). Although the much-needed revival, Keet holds, "cannot occur *through* our works, it will also not happen *without* our works" (467) (original emphasis). The church should therefore be ready "to receive what [God] in his mercy wants to give" (467).

Van Rooyen (1945a: 622-625), too, sees the DRC faced by an "enormous task" that will require "dauntless faith-based heroic courage",<sup>472</sup> "a firm hand" and "unabated activity" (622) towards the "purely Christian", "world-comprising evangelising task of the *true* Christianity", its "unique expectation of the future", and the reality where the

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<sup>470</sup> "wavering faith of the distraught human heart to rest"

<sup>471</sup> "My brothers, we experience last days"

<sup>472</sup> "Onverskrokke geloofs-heldemoed" (Van Rooyen, 1945a: 622).

*“phenomenon of sin will be eliminated for good” and “justice – according to the infallible godly standard – will dominate unimpeded” (623). More importantly, this magnificent vision is for Van Rooyen entirely based on the Protestant heritage and confessions:*

Dit is die genoemde goddelike waarhede wat skering en inslag van die suiwer-christelike godsdiens, wêreldbeskouing en lewensopvatting uitmaak. Dit is dié kader van eiesoortige waarhede wat vir die Gereformeerde-Protestantse Kerke ook so skoon en pittig saamgevat is in hul belydenisskrifte. Daardie waarhede, in hul samehang gesien en met ’n waaragtige geloof aanvaar, is ’n onnaspeurlike skat. Dit is ’n kosbare erfenis van die Protestantse christenheid deur God geskenk ... Blykens die storie tog, was manne en vroue, jongelinge en jongdogters bereid om kosbare martelaarsbloed daarvoor te stort ... Genoeg oor die rigsoere, ideale, taak en toekomsverwagting waarop ons die oog gevestig dien te hou ... Eers as die genoemde rigsoere en ideale ons helder voor die gees staan, kan ons enigsins besef waarvandaan (die huidige westerse wêreld) uitgeval het<sup>473</sup> (623).

Van Rooyen also takes care to affirm the church’s foundation is in no need of reconstruction – especially not in its “Reformed-Protestant form” (1945b: 648). The Holy Scripture and history testify to this fact:

Die Heilige Skrifte betuig dit, en dit word deur die geskiedenis op onomstootlike wyse bevestig: Rekonstruksie van die suiwer-christelike godsdiens met sy eie kader van waarhede, hoe vernuftig opgeset en ook uitgevoer, het geen hoop op reële en duursame sukses nie ... Weens inherente gebreke, sanderige bodems, slegte fondamente en rou stene in die mure, het die geboue van die s.g. ‘rekonstruksie’ van, of soos sommige dit ook noem, ‘substitute’ vir die christelike godsdiens, die een na die ander ineengestort ... Die waaragtige christelike godsdiens met sy eie van God gegewe samestel van waarhede het geen ‘rekonstruksie’ nodig nie<sup>474</sup> (648).

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<sup>473</sup> It is the named divine truths that comprise the warp and woof of the purely Christian religion, worldview and approach to life. It is this framework of unique truths that are so purely and succinctly summarised in the confessions of the Reformed-Protestant Churches. Those truths, seen as a whole and accepted as true faith, are an inscrutable treasure. It is a precious heritage of the Protestant Christianity given by God ... According to the history, still, men and women, boys and girls were willing to shed precious martyr’s blood ... Enough about the guidelines, ideals, task and future expectations on which we should keep our eyes focused ... Only when the mentioned guidelines and ideals are clear in spirit, can we realise at all from where (the current Western world) came.

<sup>474</sup> The Divine Scriptures assert that, and it is confirmed by history in an irrefutable way: Reconstruction of the purely Christian religion with its own framework of truths, however ingeniously compiled and executed, has no hope for real and lasting success ... Due to inherent shortcomings, sandy bottoms, poor foundations and raw bricks in the walls, the buildings of the so-called ‘reconstruction’ of or, as some call it, ‘substitutes’ for the Christian religion, the one after the other collapsed ... The true Christian religion with its unique God-given compilation of truths requires no ‘reconstruction’.”

Moreover, Van Rooyen states that despite all the “bruises, wounds and fresh blows”, there is, as in the time of Elijah, “a multitude of believers” who are “faithful to the triune God and his Word” and they are found particularly in the DRC (648). Although they are few in numbers, they can “met hul God “n bende stormloop en oor ’n muur spring”<sup>475</sup> (648) because they are in possession of an “inexhaustible supply of power and unwavering assurance” (648).

Gerdener also emphasises the importance of the interplay between past and future for reconstruction (Gerdener, 1943: 354). “Tradition and *volksaard*<sup>476</sup> has lasting significance”, he argues: “Each reconstruction plan that disregards precedent and tradition, runs the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater” (356).

#### 4.6.3. “*n Volk red homself*”<sup>477</sup>

Together with this deep trust in “the God of our fathers”, the heritage handed down to them and the comfort it provided, there was also the belief that the DRC’s survival depended (at least partly) on itself. Keet’s words, quoted earlier, come to mind: the revival “cannot occur *through* our works, [but] it will also not happen *without* our works” (Keet, 1945b: 467). This idea was aptly expressed in a slogan popularised by J.D. Kestell, also known as “Father Kestell”: “*n Volk red homself.*”

The emphasis on the church and the *volk*’s identity and heritage, were transposed into a call for action.

G.B.A Gerdener’s reflections on the Protestant heritage is a good example of this. He connects confession and heritage with a call for action. For him, all the big crises of the day is caused by the “verwoestende magte van ongeloof en wangeloof wat soos kankers aan ons volksbloei vreet” (Gerdener 1939g: 163). But “being pompous about a glorious past or a costly heritage will not change or improve anything”, he writes, “indien ons nie die daad by die woord sit en uitleef wat ons bely nie” (163). In a striking comparison, he expresses the hope that the heritage will have real meaning:

Vuriglik verlang ons in hierdie Hugenote-feejaar dat die duur verkreë erfenis wat ons toevertrou is meer as ooit vir ons dierbaar sal wees, nie soos menige

<sup>475</sup> “with their God run through a troop and leap over a wall.

<sup>476</sup> “nation’s nature”

<sup>477</sup> “A nation saves itself”

erfstuk van die Hugenote om dit in 'n glaskas te bewaar nie, maar om elke dag op elke lewensterrein daarmee te woeker en te bou<sup>478</sup> (163).

C.R. Kotzé takes it one step further when he articulates the calling of the church in relation to its heritage (Kotzé, 1941: 2071-2072). "The Lord has a future and a task for the Afrikanerdom", for which He has prepared and equipped them in a special way, he wrote in 1941, "namely to maintain and build white South Africa". For Kotzé, this task goes hand in hand with the "steadying of the true Christian faith in our country" (2072), and the bedrock of this task and future is in the past:

Maar vir hierdie toekoms en vir hierdie taak moet ons teruggaan na die rotsgeaardheid in ons volkskarakter van die verlede<sup>479</sup> (2072).

E.P. Groenewald writes on the future of the church with a comparable interplay between the memory of a heritage and the real need to build the future. He holds that the DRC has "the right to believe that our Church is based on the unsullied Word and the pure confession, and can therefore completely rely on the Lord's promise" (Groenewald, 1947: 756). But that does not mean, holds Groenewald, that the church is absolved of its obligation "to harness all its powers in order to ensure its own future" (756).

Groenewald sees the massive worldwide upheavals as culminating in South Africa, placing "die Boerekerk in die voorste linie van die stryd"<sup>480</sup> (756). Christian churches have the responsibility to fight against the unchristian tendencies in the world, and for Groenewald the Afrikaans churches were the strongest of all churches in this battle. In one breath, he mentions the resources of these churches as being "the Reformed Confession together with the deep conviction of the necessity of purity of blood, racial apartheid, and the superiority of spiritual goods over material possession" (756). Again he emphasises that, although "the promise of Christ is the fulcrum, the battle is for the church's own account" (756).

It is also interesting to see how specific the call to action was. Van Rooyen emphasised the value and costliness of the DRC's heritage, and then continued by arguing that the following things need to be addressed in order to secure it: church visitation, the family and the holiness of marriage (given its strategic value for *volk* and church), artificial birth

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<sup>478</sup> We long passionately during this Huguenot jubilee that the costly heritage entrusted to us will more than ever be dear to us, not like a myriad heirlooms of the Huguenots to preserve it in a glass cabinet, but to develop and build with it in every area of life.

<sup>479</sup> But for this future and for this task, we should return to the rock disposition in our nation's character of the past.

<sup>480</sup> "the Farmer's church in the firing line of the struggle"

control, alcoholism, prostitution, “mammonism”,<sup>481</sup> and a deficient awareness of sin and guilt<sup>482</sup> (1945a: 625).

#### 4.5.4. *“We believe in unity and diversity”*

An article by J.C. Lombard (1948) serves as a good illustration of the ways in which reverence for heritage, commitment to the Confessions as a key part of that heritage, and a vision for society became intertwined.

The article is, tellingly, titled “Ons bely in eenheid en verskeidenheid”<sup>483</sup> (Lombard, 1948: 13). It shows how the different aspects that came to be associated with the Confessions themselves attained confessional status. This “confessional status” should be understood in a two related ways: on the one hand, it implies authority and, on the other, something in which someone would place their ultimate trust.

In the article Lombard states that he is giving a summary of some ideas presented by the Dutch minister H.J. Spier in articles published in the journal *Bezinning*.<sup>484</sup> Interestingly, Lombard gives us an almost accidental definition of what it means to confess right at the start of the article: “As die mens bely is dit ‘n geloofswerksaamheid, hetsy ongelowig of Godgerig”<sup>485</sup> (13). A confession, as his article shows, is also regarded as something with real and decisive meaning, and not just a mere “document to neatly preserve” (13).

Lombard argues that Reformed confessors have reached consensus about the fact “that we are Christian confessors of all terrains of life”: “Kortom: ons is ook Christelike belyers in nie-kerklike samelewingsverbande en maatskaplike verhoudings”<sup>486</sup> (13). But this means that there is “variety in confessions” (13). For Lombard, the church as a “sheer faith community” should remain a faith community, but as citizens or members of a Christian political party, people are also part of a “political faith community” based on a specific ideology and Christian policy that we “believe and confess and propagate” (13).

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<sup>481</sup> These three, alcoholism, prostitution and mammonism, Van Rooyen calls “drie onooglike monsters... wat as soveel onversadigbare bloedsuiers voortdurend beseig is om die lewensbloed van baie van die moderne mensheid uit te suig en so groot skade en ellende op sosiale gebied aan te rig” (Van Rooyen, 1945a: 625).

<sup>482</sup> “Gebrekkige sondebeseif en skuldbewussyn” (Van Rooyen, 1945a: 625).

<sup>483</sup> “We believe in unity and diversity”

<sup>484</sup> I did not compare Spier’s original article with Lombard’s summary of it. It would be safe to assume that Lombard’s ideas are not original, but primarily a reflection of Spier’s ideas. It also shows influence of kuyperian ideas in South African theological and political discourse at the time.

<sup>485</sup> “If man confesses, it is a spiritual mentation, whether faithless or God-oriented”

<sup>486</sup> “In short: we are Christian believers in non-churchly societal context and social relationships”



In the same vein there is also a “judicial faith community” and an “economic faith community” (13). This means that there are “faith activities” (“geloofsaktiwiteite”) for all the different societal contexts.

Although the “churchly confession” is said to be the central confession in every human life, and also “broader and more encompassing” than any other confession, Lombard states that it is not sufficient (13). Therefore, a confession that is specific to every sphere should be drawn up (13). Although these will be “smaller in scope” than the churchly confessions, “the three Formulae only incidentally touch on the non-ecclesial spheres” (13). Lombard continues:

In die Drie Formuliere – en mens kan begryp – vind mens baie min t.o.v. prinsipiële norme vir die nie-kerklike terrein. Ons kan nie met ’n kerklike belydenis volstaan nie. Dit het werklik min sin en betekenis om ons nie-kerklike verbande en organisasies met ‘the way of the least resistance’ op die Drie Formuliere te grond; wat andersyds weer so baie bevat wat nie direk geldend is vir die nie-kerklike lewe nie, want dis op die kerklike lewe toegespits<sup>487</sup> (13).

The significance of Lombard’s article, for the purposes of this study, lies in its assertion of the limits of the Formulae of Unity. Lombard admits that the Formulae do not provide answers to all questions. However, the answers that are given to political, economic, social and judicial questions are framed as confessional.

## 4.7. Conclusion

The 1930s and 1940s was a time of dramatic change for the DRC and the Afrikaners. This chapter traced the DRC’s positioning of itself, amid the challenges of the times, and the role that the Heidelberg Catechism played in it.

In general, Confessions as a core part of the DRC’s heritage, received a lot of attention in this period. There was a supposed surge of interest in the Confessions (as a result of the Du Plessis case) and also the awakening of a confessional “urge” in the DRC. These

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<sup>487</sup> The Three Formulae – and one can understand – one finds seldom with regard to principal norms for the non-church terrain. We cannot be content with a churchly confession. There is really little sense and meaning to it to ground our non-churchly contexts and organisations through ‘the way of the least resistance’ on the Three Formulae; which then again contains so much that is not directly applicable to the non-churchly life, because it is aimed at the churchly life.

phenomena were portrayed as occurring “naturally”, or as being the work of the Holy Spirit.

We have also seen how the DRC purposefully defined herself as a confessional church, and what the characteristics of a confessional church were for them. A confessional church was, first of all, a church founded on the Reformed Confessions, but also one that had a close association with the Afrikaner volk. It was also a church with a specific history – one that connects the early church with the DRC. The core characteristics of this confessional church were said to be stability, rigidity, like-mindedness, unity, unanimity, order and clear and definite boundaries. The calling of the DRC was expressed in similar terms: to be a pillar of steadfastness. The new-found “urge” of the DRC to confess was seen as an awakening and realisation of its calling. Moreover, the urge to confess was related to an “urge to be ourselves.” The DRC’s act of separation can thus be said to have sprouted from an act of isolation: an emphasis on loyalty to the own, taking care of our own, and enforcing boundaries. This self-definition in confessional terms was influenced and informed by a historical awakening.

The importance of the heritage as a concept, as traced in 4.4., demonstrates this. The DRC’s understanding of its heritage shows a significant merger between confessional identity and a specific memory of its history. Although this is not surprising (given the fact that Confessions are constitutive of the reformed tradition, and hence seen to be essentially historical), the very nature of this merger is important (see 4.4). If the Formulae are representative of and associated with Protestant and Christian history as told by the DRC at the time (including their own part in this history), it makes for a very influential and emotion-laden ecclesial basis. This professedly confessional basis represented very specific loyalties, virtues (including suggestions of how they ought to be embodied) and ideals. Although the specific connections made between the Formulae and heritage are particularly good examples of this, the role of the so-called Liberal Struggle together with the Du Plessis case cannot be overlooked. We have seen that these two historical events were remembered as examples of the DRC’s faithfulness to their Reformed roots in the face of fierce adversity and animosity. The dominating memory was that the DRC (bravely) succeeded in protecting and preserving the Formulae of Unity.

The historical narratives in which the DRC grounded itself, and in which the Confessions were incorporated, have the following characteristics: they are filled with martyrdom and persecution (stories told in bloody terms), and with heroes that defended the church and her heritage despite these difficulties. These heroes and their actions are further remembered as constituting the rock that is the DRC’s past. It provided the DRC with an unwavering and solid past worthy of imitation. The wide variety of things constituting this heritage (including Confessions, farms, church buildings, virtues) had to be defended, and

if needed, sacrifices had to be made for them. At the same time, however, it was in a metaphorical way depicted as an apt weapon with which to defend oneself.

In a period experienced as disruptive, deteriorating and declining, the DRC's heritage, including Confessions, was presented as a point of stability, something with incredible value, and something that protects.

Over and above its definition as a confessional church, the DRC also understood itself as being besieged. This led to the development of a stiffened and belligerent identity in association with the Confessions. However, this idea of being besieged together with a confirmation of its rock-solid past, created a springboard for engaging with the future. The past was a point of orientation for the DRC: "koers in die krisis". Holding on to what it regarded as unchanging, the DRC and the community of which it consisted orchestrated and sustained considerable transformations in various spheres of its existence.

The affirmation of a meaningful and God-willed past was seen as a promise of a meaningful future. Securing this future, however, depended on the community's obedience to God.

## Chapter 5

### Commemoration and Identity

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter delves deeper into the *return of history* that started in the mid 1930s. It starts by discussing a popular appeal that was heard at the time: “keep thy feasts”. This call to remember was complemented by an emphasis on official historiography by the DRC (as discussed in 5.3.) and also by instituting an extensive commemorative calendar. The past was not only remembered but also re-enacted.

In 5.5. and 5.6., the memories of the Heidelberg Catechism between 1948 and 1963 are discussed and analysed, with special attention being paid to the 400<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1963.

In the final section the unification of the five DRC synods is discussed as an event supposedly following from a shared confessional basis.

#### 5.2. “Keep thy feasts”

The 1938 centenary of the Great Trek is widely regarded as leaving a decided imprint on Afrikaner political development and consciousness.<sup>488</sup> At that time, the annual celebration of the *Day of the Covenant* on 16 December was also a well-established practice. *Die Kerkbode* and *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* paid ample attention to the Great Trek centenary (1938), as well as the (postponed) 250-year commemoration of the French Huguenots’ arrival in South Africa (1939). The effect that these two commemorations had on the historical consciousness of the DRC is reflected in some of the examples cited in the previous chapter. “Die Hugenoot” and “die Voortrekker”, together with “die Geus”, are time and again remembered as being the direct ancestors of (members of) the DRC.

However, these events also ignited a more widespread commemorative fever. The call to “keep thy feasts” was often expressed in the pages of church and theological publications.

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<sup>488</sup> See Grundlingh and Sapire (1989) for a good overview of the commemorations of the Great Trek since 1938.

It started in the late 1930s with the Great Trek centenary and the commemoration of the arrival of the French Huguenots, and continued and gathered momentum in the 1940s and 1950s in relation to various events. Although specific commemorations had specific characteristics, there seems to have been a general idea about what constitutes right or wrong commemoration.

A series of articles in 1948 with the heading “Vier julle feesdae”<sup>489</sup> serves as admonishment to take feast days seriously (Du Toit, 1948a: 1354-1355; Du Toit, 1948b: 1475-1476). It speaks to a “sluggishness” of congregations to celebrate (Du Toit, 1948a: 1354), and states that “die sorge van die lewe die feesstemming uit die hart [verdring]”<sup>490</sup> (1354). As an antidote to this inertia, the series of articles sets out to trace the origins of the feast days and also the meaning attributed to them by the past (1354). Conradie (1953: 789) reports on a conference organised for church councils in 1953 with the theme *Ons Kerklike Feesdae* and the sub-themes “its history”, “its meaning” and “how it ought to be celebrated”. Conradie values “die mooi gees van broederliefde en bewustheid van die groot betekenis van ons kerklike feesdae”<sup>491</sup> (789) that was present at the conference, and also encourages more discussion and writing of the meaning of these days and how they ought to be celebrated. The “true meaning of the feast days”, he writes, ought to be “realised and lived” (789).

In 1943, someone writing under the pseudonym “Emeritus” refers to the practice during church visitations to ask whether religious feast days have been observed. Instead of just being satisfied with a “yes” answer to that question, he writes, more scrutinising questions should be asked: “What do we need to pay more attention to – Dingaan’s Day or Christmas or Easter and Good Friday? What day suffers the most from misuse?” (Emeritus, 1943: 184). These questions are important, he states, because care needs to be taken that “religious festivals do not compare poorly to national feast days” (184). Therefore, he calls upon “ministers, church councils and congregants to gird up and to preserve the religious festivals and restore its honour” (184).

In some instances Christian commemorations are distinguished from *volksfeeste*<sup>492</sup> while in others the two are often simply conflated under the heading “ons feesdae.”<sup>493</sup> When specifically Christian festivals are addressed, ministers and church councils are criticised

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<sup>489</sup> “celebrate your festival days”

<sup>490</sup> “life’s troubles displace the festive mood in the heart”

<sup>491</sup> “the beautiful spirit of brotherly love and awareness of the great meaning of our churchly feast days”

<sup>492</sup> “national festivals”

<sup>493</sup> “our feast days”

for not treating *kerklike feeste*<sup>494</sup> with enough solemnity (Septuaginta, 1949: 384).<sup>495</sup> Congregants' lack of interest in these celebrations are treated as a worrisome phenomenon, and one that requires an action plan (384). There is concern about the "ontaarding van ons Christelike feesdae"<sup>496</sup> and the ways they are being "disregarded and belittled" (Viljoen, 1954: 869). The *manner* in which these Christian commemorations *ought* to be conducted (often in ways that should be clearly distinguished from mere celebrations of the *volk*) is a big topic of discussion and said to be of concern to the whole church (Smith, 1948: 1002; Malan, 1954: 23).<sup>497</sup> A correspondent writing under the pseudonym "Jeremia" quotes from Isaiah 1 when he complains about a recent celebration of "Dingaansdag":

Soos dit tans gaan, vrees ek dat die Here ook vir ons soos vir Israel sal sê soos in Jes 1 staan: 'Julle Sabatte en vergaderinge verdra ek nie.' ... Moet ons nie vóór die feesdag en voor die biddag ons in stilte afsonder om na te dink oor ons weë en sondes nie? Ek het noukeurig opgelet met die laaste fees en biddag hoe die mense klompies staan, grappe maak en politiek gesels tot op die laaste oomblik ... Sou God 'n behae hê in daardie soort verootmoediging en Sabbatsviering? ... Het ons monumente- en heldevereringe nie 'n volslae afgodiese affêre geword nie? ... Ek vrees dat die biddae en feeste vir ons veelal tot 'n toormiddel geword het<sup>498</sup> (Jeremia, 1949: 558).

S.J.A. Du Plessis (1960: 933), too, is suspicious of the nationwide tendency to "lavishly" celebrate "quarter centenaries, half centenaries, and centenaries". He sees in it the glorification of humanity ("menseverheerliking") that is at odds with "South African Christian traditions" (933).

The DRC was critical of commemorations that did not sufficiently recognise the religious aspect of historical events, and it was emphasised that commemorations should not be occasions for political chit-chat. In the run-up to the Van Riebeeck tercentenary in 1952,

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<sup>494</sup> "church festivals"

<sup>495</sup> "Moet ons dan nie met dringender erns as wat gewy word aan ons nasionale feeste ons toelê op ons *kerklike feeste* nie? ... Wat moet *gedoen* word?" (Septuaginta, 1949: 384).

<sup>496</sup> "degeneration of our Christian festivals"

<sup>497</sup> "'n Saak wat tesame met so baie ander vandag die ernstige aandag van ons Kerk in geheel moet geniet, is die wyse waarop ons kerklike feesdae behoort gevier te word" (Smith, 1948: 1002).

<sup>498</sup> "As it is currently going, I fear that the Lord will also tell us like He told Israel as Jes 1 states: 'The Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure.' ... Should we not seclude ourselves in silence before the feast day and before the day of worship to reflect on our ways and our sins? I observed closely at the last festival and day of worship how the people stood together, made jokes and talked politics until the last moment ... Would God be delighted in this kind of humility and Sabbath celebration? ... Has our honouring of monuments and heroes not become an utter idolised affair? ... I fear that the days of worship and festivals have often become a magical medium for us.

for example, they appointed a special committee to attend to the religious celebration of it.

In sharp contradiction to the *historical* nature of a commemoration, the religious emphasis, it was argued, would expressly transpose it to a supposedly timeless reality. On occasion of the celebration of “Heldedag” in 1945, for example, the commemoration is specifically set out as an event during which the celebrants can “part with the material world” and focus their attention on that which is “everlasting and immortal” (Editorial, 1945a: 354). In 1944, the ability of heroes to provide “everlasting inspiration”<sup>499</sup> for people is praised (Editorial, 1944: 239). Heroism, it is said, can therefore never be divorced from the nobility of faith (“geloofsadel”) (1945: 354). “A hero is always a man of faith” as he is someone who must “conquer reality” and be able to “see reality in eternity’s light” (354). True heroism is thus more than “sheer fearlessness in the struggle” or “reckless bravery in danger” (354). True heroism is “deliberate courage of faith” which operates “against all rational considerations”, declaring: “here I stand, I cannot do otherwise” (354).

There seems to have been a conviction that the emphasis on the religious aspect of the *volk*’s history was important for keeping nationalism within bounds. When Ben Marais in 1939 writes on the obstacles facing Protestants all over the world, he singles out ultranationalism but argues that it is to be distinguished from “the historical nationalism that we have become used to in South Africa” (Marais, 1939: 536). South African nationalism is seen by Marais as a “positive force” and “great constructive factor” because of the fact that it is “tempered and inspired by our Protestant Christendom” and “walked along with our religion” (536). Ultranationalism, argues Marais, despite the many resemblances to South African nationalism, is something distinctly different because of its “strong emphasis on race, its ideas on the state, and its generally less sympathetic and often hostile attitude towards Christianity or even all religions” (536). Turkish nationalism is mentioned as an example, because “being Turkish” is projected as the paramount driving force at the cost of loyalty to Christianity or Islam (536).

Even though the Christian festivals (Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost) are sometimes distinguished from other festivals, the Christian and the *volk*’s calendar were also merged.

The series of articles by Du Toit, referred to above, lists Dingane’s Day together with

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<sup>499</sup> “onverganklike besieling”



Christmas and Ascension day, for example, in its discussion of Reformed Christianity's history (Du Toit, 1948a: 1354-1355). The most significant example of this conflation, however, is a 1956 article by C.F. Visser, titled "Ons groot feesdae"<sup>500</sup> (1956: 744-745). Visser's calendar of feast days is as follows: Van Riebeeck Day on 6 April, Good Friday, Ascension Day, Union day on 31 May,<sup>501</sup> Kruger Day (or "Heldedag"<sup>502</sup>) on 10 October,<sup>503</sup> Day of the Covenant ("Geloftedag") on 16 December,<sup>504</sup> and Christmas Day<sup>505</sup> (744-745). Moreover, Visser sees a special significance in the fact that Good Friday and Ascension Day are the feast days that follow so shortly after Van Riebeeck Day. These days are about the "central truth of Christianity" and their placing in relation to Van Riebeeck Day tells him something about the *volk*:

... presies asof daar nou allereers die behoefte gevoel word om nie alleen belydenis van ons geloof te doen nie, maar om dit ook na buite bekend te stel. Dis asof die viering van ons Christelike geloof die eerste groot volksdaad is, wat hier regtens op die volksplanting moet volg<sup>506</sup> (744).

The DRC's opinion about the need to commemorate the birthday of Paul Kruger also had religious tones. When, after what is described as a "long and ugly history", consensus is reached that the tenth of October (the birthday of Paul Kruger) should be a public holiday, *Die Kerkbode* rejoices in the fact that there will henceforth be "a feast day of inspiration for country and *volk*" (Editorial, 1949a: 755). This day was known as *Heldedag* (Heroes Day). There is said to be a big need for such a day because of the fact that so few public holidays exist that are "truly Afrikaans" and, more importantly, "lend [themselves] to be *Christian volksfees[te]*" (755). Paul Kruger is remembered as "the one big figure that dominates the whole past and binds together the *volk* as Christian *volksvader*" (755).

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<sup>500</sup> "Our great feast days"

<sup>501</sup> "Tot vaslegging van hierdie volksfees sal die tyd nog die meeste bydra, die tyd wanneer ons die ideaal gaan bereik van één volk, één vlag en één volkslied" (Visser, 1956: 744-745).

<sup>502</sup> "Heroes Day"

<sup>503</sup> "In die geskiedenis lewe ons helde en heldinne voort, net soos hul name ook op ons lippe bly lewe, net soos hul heldefigure ons ook op ons volkspad dag vir dag bly voorlig. Dat Krugerdag en sy groot betekenis vir ons volk in hoë eerbeid en waardering sal styg en toeneem, daarvan oortuig die ondervinding ons van jaar tot jaar. Ons koester nog groot verwagtinge van ons feesvieringe op 10 Oktober" (Visser, 1956: 745).

<sup>504</sup> "Die volk dank God Almagtig vir Sy verlossing uit die dreigende mag van die barbaardom ... waar die volk byeenkom om die hart op te hef tot ons God, ook die God van ons vaders, soos dit ons as Godsvolk pas ... alle poging om die gewyde karakter van die fees te verander, behoort steeds deur ons weerstaan te word" (Visser, 1956: 745).

<sup>505</sup> "Kersaand het vir ons 'n familiefes gebring ... wat ... die familiebande nouer toehaai en met wonderlike innigheid versterk" (Visser, 1956: 745).

<sup>506</sup> "... exactly as if the need to not confess our faith alone is now felt for the first time, but to also reveal it to the outside. It is as if the celebration of our Christian faith is the first big national act, which should rightly follow the planting of the nation"

It is also worth noting how outspoken the DRC was about the need to commemorate Heroes Day before it was made official by the state. In 1944, *Die Kerkbode* wrote that the celebration of *Helddedag* is something the church “gladly grants the Afrikaner people” (Editorial, 1944: 239). People have a “strong urge to honour the memory of their heroes” and this is seen as such a “natural urge” that it need not be something to argue about (239). *Die Kerkbode* underscored the need for heroes in a *volk*’s life and their role in creating the future:

Hoe spoediger ons landsowerheid daartoe oorgaan om 10 Oktober tot openbare vakansiedag te verklaar, des te beter sal dit vir almal wees. As in ons land met sy gemengde bevolking gewag moet word totdat almal eenstemmig is oor ’n saak soos hierdie, sal daar vir niemand ooit ’n Helddedag wees nie. Hier is ’n vrug wat reeds van alle kante so ryp gedruk is, dat die owerheid ’n diens aan ons land sal bewys om dit te laat val in die skoot van diegene wat dit so innig begeer ...

Iemand het tereg gesê dat elke ware volksheld die geskiedenis ’n stap verder voer en gedagtes in beweging bring wat in hoë mate heilsaam inwerk op die volkslewe. Sulke helde en heldinne ken ons Afrikanervolk ook – manne en vroue wie se karakteradel, volksliefde en godsdienssin blinkende spore nagelaat het, wat onverganklike besieling vir die nageslag is. En dan mag ons nooit vergeet nie: die skaar van helde en heldinne wie se name miskien nie op die voorgrond kom nie, maar wat deur hul stille arbeid, voorbeeld en gebed ons volkslewe deur die jare heen verryk het<sup>507</sup> (239).

As we will see in the rest of the chapter, the DRC played an important role in maintaining the commemorative calendar of its members in particular, and the *volk* in general.

### 5.3. “South Africa does not easily forget”

The growing importance of heritage and commemoration was also reflected in the formal concern with the history and historiography of the Afrikaner people and the DRC. The

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<sup>507</sup> The sooner our country’s government proceeds to declare 10 October a public holiday, the better for everyone. If, in our country with its diverse population, we should wait until everyone agrees on an issue like this, there will be no Heroes Day for anybody. Here is a fruit that has already been pressed so ripe from all sides that the government will show a service to our country by letting it fall into the laps of those who so desperately desire it ...

Someone rightly said that every true national hero takes history a step further and gets thoughts moving that influence national life in a highly beneficial way. Our Afrikaner nation also knows such heroes and heroines – men and women whose noble character, love of nation and sense of religion left a shining trail, which is eternal inspiration for the descendants. And then we may never forget: the crowd of heroes and heroines whose names are perhaps not well known, but who enrich our national life over the years through their labour, example and prayer.

novelty of this emphasis on history did not go by unnoticed.

The advocacy for commemoration discussed above is embedded in a palpable concern for historical knowledge, historiography, and historical continuity. Dozens of articles on historical events, figures and celebrations are published in *Die Kerkbode* at the time.<sup>508</sup> (This list of references is only for the sake of demonstration, and in no way complete.) However, it is worth noting that only six of those articles are about church or theological history outside the scope of South African history – i.e. only a small minority of historical reflections are focused on history other than direct Afrikaner and DRC history. This is a definite shift when compared to tendencies in the 1930s and early 1940s. In this period, numerous articles on historical figures linked to the Reformation and its immediate aftermath were published in *Die Kerkbode*.<sup>509</sup>

This relatively new “deep concern” with history is reflected on in an article that reports on the visit of Johan Bavinck to South Africa in 1952 (Uit Transvaal, 1953: 614-615). Under the subheading “Ons gehegtheid aan ons geskiedenis”,<sup>510</sup> the Afrikaners’ concern for their history and attachment to their history are said to be something noticed by visitors, and also by Bavinck, as a recent phenomenon.

Dit was nie altyd so nie. Dit is te betwyfel of daar ’n boek oor die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika vir algemene gebruik voor 1920 die lig gesien het. Die verhaal word nou nog vertel van hoe die gevierde skrywer C.J. Langenhoven ongeveer 35 jaar gelede êrens ... die kinders van die skool moes toespreek en begin het deur die vraag te stel: ‘Wanneer het Jan van Riebeeck na Suid-Afrika gekom?’ daar was geen antwoord nie; niemand het geweet nie! Maar toe hy voortgaan deur te vra: ‘When did William the Conqueror come to England?’ toe het dit dadelik uit tientalle kele gekom: ‘1066’ – in Engels! Hierdie insident vertel genoeg. Die Afrikaner was nie altyd so geheg aan sy geskiedenis nie. Daar was selfs ’n tyd toe hy dit nie geken het nie.

Hierdie gehegtheid van die Afrikaner aan sy geskiedenis wat in die lig van die interpretasie van die geskiedenis deur sommige teenswoordig byna as ’n misdaad beskou word, het spontaan gekom. Voor en ná die Eerste

<sup>508</sup> See Pauw 1948: 219-223; Uit die Vrystaat 1948a: 403 ff.; Uit die Vrystaat 1948b: 516-517; Uit die Vrystaat 1948c: 642-644; Uit die Vrystaat 1948d: 1349-1351; Hanekom 1948: 518-520; Pienaar 1948a: 752-754; Pienaar 1948b: 816-818; Murray 1948: 822 ff.; Kotzé 1948a: 886-888; Breedts 1948: 621-624; Van der Merwe 1948a: 945ff.; Gerdner 1948a: 1327-1331; Gerdner 1948b: 1384-1386; Uit Transvaal 1948a: 178 ff.; Uit Transvaal 1948b: 789-790; Venter 1948a: 793 ff.; Venter 1948b: 912ff.; Venter 1948c: 977 ff.; Venter 1948d: 1105 ff.; Venter 1948e: 1226 ff.; Uit die Vrystaat 1948e: 1222-1225; Classen 1956: 894 ff.; Du Toit 1959: 293; ff.; Editorial 1959a: 4.

<sup>509</sup> See for example Wessels 1933a: 441-442; Wessel 1935a: 203-207; Wessels 1935b: 247ff; Wessels 1935c: 296ff; Wessels 1935d: 434-436; Wessels 1935e: 1228ff.

<sup>510</sup> “Our attachment to our history”

Wêreldoorlog is die Afrikaanse volk oor dieptes geslinger wat hom laat gryp het na en laat vashou het aan die feite van sy eie verlede. Dit is tog natuurlik en menslik om as die weg dof word of versper raak, dan terug te kyk vanwaar jy gekom het en so jou koers te bepaal. Dit is wat met ons gebeur het nie lank gelede nie, en vandag is dit waar: **Suid-Afrika vergeet nie maklik nie.**<sup>511</sup> Dit moet ook erken word dat die Calvinistiese lewensbekouing van die Afrikaner die geskiedenis vir hom van besondere betekenis maak. Hy probeer om die regerende hand van God te sien, ook in sy droefste lotgevalle en, wat die toekoms betref, is sy hart gevul met kalme geloofsvertroue. Die woord van God is al so dikwels aan hom bevestig toe die onmoontlike moontlik geword het<sup>512</sup> (614).

Although the author claims that this fondness of history spontaneously developed, the DRC's deliberate efforts to write history and construct historical continuity is evident in *Die Kerkbode*. A clear-cut example of this is an address from the church's archivist to the synods (Pretorius, 1948: 459-460). H.S. Pretorius starts his appeal for cooperation by stating "a *volk* without a past is a *volk* without a future" (459). As support for his statement, he points to the steps taken by "beskaafde volke ... in verband met die goeie bewaring en wetenskaplike versorging van hul staatsoorkondes"<sup>513</sup> (459). He warns that a church who disregards its past will pay for it in the future (459).<sup>514</sup> In conjunction with Pretorius's appeal, the *Raad van die Kerke*, too, underscored the need for "geskoolde en stelselmatige arbeid in verband met die Suid-Afrikaanse Kerkgeskiedenis" at its 1955 meeting (Rex, 1955: 11).

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<sup>511</sup> Original emphasis

<sup>512</sup> It was not always this way. It is doubtful that a book about the history of South Africa for general use saw the light before 1920. The story is still told of how the celebrated writer C.J. Langenhoven about 35 years ago somewhere ... addressed the children of the school and started by asking, 'When did Jan van Riebeeck come to South Africa?' There was no answer; no one knew! But when he continued by asking, 'When did the Conqueror come to England?', it immediately came from tens of mouths: '1066' – in English! This incident says enough. The Afrikaner was not always as attached to his history. There was even a time when he did not know it.

This attachment of the Afrikaner to his history, which in light of the interpretation of the history is almost considered by some as a crime, came about spontaneously. Before and after the First World War, the Afrikaans nation was thrown into the depths which made him grab and hold on to the facts of his past. When the way gets dark or is obstructed, it is of course natural and human to look back at where you come from to determine your course. This is what happened to us, not long ago, and is true today: **South Africa does not forget easily**. It should also be admitted that the Calvinist view of life of the Afrikaner makes the history of exceptional meaning to him. He tries seeing the ruling hand of God, also in his most grievous fortunes and, regarding the future, his heart is filled with calm trust in God. The word of God has been proven to him so often when the impossible became possible.

<sup>513</sup> "civilised nations ... in relation to the good preservation and scientific nurturing of their state charters"

<sup>514</sup> Pretorius also conveys his plan to print and distribute the oldest synodical minutes (dated 1853 to 1879), believing that much good can come from it for the church (Pretorius, 1948: 460).

Apart from the recognised need for professional history, there are ample examples of constructing and conveying a unified account of the DRC's history, and particularly to point out its historical continuity with the church supposedly established by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 and the church of the *Voortrekkers* (Uit die Vrystaat, 1948a: 403 ff.; 1948c: 642-644; Hugo, 1959: 747; Uit Transvaal, 1942: 12-13; Uit die Vrystaat, 1948b: 516-517; 1948e: 1225-1225; Pretorius, 1942: 409-413). This church of 1652 is also explicitly defined as a church of the Confessions of Dordt. The refreshment station and the settlement in the Cape are said to have started with the "*Statebybel, die Geref. Kerk en die Dordtse Belydenisskrifte*"<sup>515</sup> (Uit die Vrystaat, 1948a: 403). The history of the French Huguenots and their settlement in South Africa, too, are integrated into the narrative of the church and the people who struggled to secure her survival, and with it, the costly religious heritage of the Reformation (Van der Merwe, 1948a: 945).<sup>516</sup> Van der Merwe specifically mentions "'n Gereformeerde belydenis'"<sup>517</sup> as one of the elements constituting the Huguenots' heritage. Emphasis is put on the fact that there was no "verengelsing of ontaarding sedert 1824 of 1843"<sup>518</sup> but rather the church maintained its "original characteristics" through the years with "tenacity" (Hugo, 1959: 747). Hugo presents these historical facts as speaking for themselves: "Kommentaar lyk my oorbodig! *Wie ooren heeft, die hoore!*"<sup>519</sup> (747).<sup>520</sup>

An article titled "Aanskou die Rots"<sup>521</sup> (also see 4.5.4) shows a meaningful relation between the past, present and future that appears to come together and depend on commemoration. This is coupled with a moral imperative to remember:

Ons is besig om geskiedenis te maak. Ons nageslag sal die geskiedenis lees. Dis sake van lewensbelang waarmee ons besig is. Ons moet dus besef dat die Here spreek tot die volk ... Ons moet terugkyk. Daar is so baie mense in Suid-Afrika wat geen geskiedenis in ons skole wil hê nie, wat ook van geen geskiedenis in ons toesprake wil hoor nie; maar soos 'n boom leef en groei uit sy wortels moet ook ons volk tog leef en groei uit sy geskiedenis ... ons moet

<sup>515</sup> "State Bible, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Confessions of Dordt"

<sup>516</sup> "Hulle was vlugteling uit hul eie land wat van huis en haard en in baie gevalle selfs goeie vooruitsig na die tydelike, afstand gedoen het om te kan behou wat hulle as die kosbaarste besitting op aarde beskou het, t.w. 'n eie godsdienstige oortuiging in die vorm van 'n Gereformeerde belydenis, wat as 'n erfgoed aan hulle toevertrou is deur 'n stoere voorgeslag wat vir ongeveer 150 jaar lank 'n bange maar vasberade worstelstryd gevoer het om hierdie geestelike skat onder die druk van vervolging nie weer kwyt te raak nie. Nie stoflike gewin nie, maar geestelike selfbehoud ..." (Van der Merwe, 1948a: 945).

<sup>517</sup> "a Reformed confession"

<sup>518</sup> "Anglicisation or depravation since 1824 or 1843"

<sup>519</sup> "Commentary seems unnecessary! Those with ears, they hear!"

<sup>520</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>521</sup> "Look unto the Rock"

terugkyk na die rotsvaste karakters van die voorouers wat God vir ons gekies het. Daar moet erns wees by hierdie jaar se feeste<sup>522</sup> (Uit die Vrystaat, 1949a: 884).

There are also strong reactions to historical narratives that challenge the ones told by the DRC. In response to a remark by senator G.H. Nicholls stating that the history of South Africa needs to be rewritten, *Die Kerkbode* protests that DRC history is misappropriated for political reasons and that Nicholls gives an eschewed representation of the past (Editorial, 1949b: 11). Contesting Nicholls' account of the British influence on the DRC and the role of Daniel Lindley in establishing a church for the *Voortrekkers*, *Die Kerkbode* concludes:

Dit is maar één feit uit baie wat aangehaal kan word om die nuwe plan waarop Senator Nicholls ons kerkgeskiedenis wil bou, soos 'n kaartehuis in duie te laat stort<sup>523</sup> (11).

A longstanding feud<sup>524</sup> with the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) on the historical continuity with the church established by Van Riebeeck in 1652, also flames up in 1951<sup>525</sup> (Editorial, 1951a: 267; Editorial, 1951b: 604). After an article in *Die Hervormer* (January 1951) that claims historical continuity for the NHK, *Die Kerkbode* reacts by calling it an untenable and ungrounded account (Editorial, 1951a: 267) despite the so-called "onomstootbare historiese feite" on which *Die Hervormer* based its account (Editorial, 1959b: 607). The account is set straight<sup>526</sup> and the facts, seen from the DRC's perspective, underscored: "So staan sake!"<sup>527</sup> (267). *Die Kerkbode* also bemoans the way in which the NHK hampers cooperation between the two churches by its historical account:

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<sup>522</sup> We are busy making history. Our descendants will read the history. It is matters of life and death with which we are busy. We should therefore realise that the Lord speaks to the nation ... We should look back. There are so many people in South Africa who want no history in our schools, who also do not want to hear any history in our speeches; but like a tree lives and grows from its roots, our nation should live and grow from its history ... we should look back at the rock-solid characters of the ancestors whom God chose. There should be earnestness at this year's festivals.

<sup>523</sup> This is but one of many facts that can be quoted to let the new plan on which Senator Nicholls wants to build our church history collapse like a house of cards.

<sup>524</sup> See Scholtz, G.D. 1951. *Ons Kerknaam*. Johannesburg.

<sup>525</sup> A 1942 article argues whether the NHK has the right to celebrate its centenary or not (Pretorius, 1942: 409-413).

<sup>526</sup> "Hierdie 'feite' is inderdaad nie moeilik om om te stoot nie ... Ons moet dus andermaal besluit met die gevolgtrekking dat die 'bewyse' wat aangevoer is deur Die Hervormer nie bestaan nie en dat die hele konstruksie wat op die gang van ons kerkgeskiedenis geplaas word, so onwaar is as wat die poging ongelukkig genoem moet word ... Die hele voorstelling daar dra 'n onmiskenbare kerkistiese stempel wat 'n mens teen elke prys moet vermy in ons kerkgeskiedskrywing" (Editorial, 1959a: 604).

<sup>527</sup> "So are things!"

Aan die samewerking het ons behoefte, maar dan met dié Hervormde Kerk wat in 1853 in Transvaal ontstaan het. Trouens, vóór die tyd het daar nie so 'n Kerk bestaan nie – nie in ons land nie!<sup>528</sup> (267)

In the acceptance speech of his position as professor of church history at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, T.N. Hanekom also reflected on this issue within reformed historiography at the time (Hanekom, 1960: 1-14). Although he agrees that the history of the DRC should be critically assessed, he rejects the NHK and GKSA's accounts of DRC history as one-sided (4). For Hanekom, the DRC's faithfulness to its Reformed roots and the *volk* it serves is unquestionable and adds to its stature:

As die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika besien word in die lig van sy verdienste en prestasies, met 'n nadruk op alles wat hy gedoen het om sy afkoms te eer, die volk waaronder hy werk te dien op maatskaplike, opvoedkundige en kulturele gebied, dan sou hy inderdaad kon heenwys na 'n indrukwekkende verlede wat in meer as een opsig tot dankbaarheid stem<sup>529</sup> (Hanekom, 1960: 3).

In further clarification of the “true” history of the DRC, Hanekom firmly denies claims that the English occupation influenced the DRC, i.e. that Scottish ministers who served the church compromised its reverence for the Formulae, and affirms that the DRC was loyal to the Afrikaner *volk* and its ideals (7). He also rejects claims that pietist, methodist or liberal tendencies, despite their presence in the DRC, had any lasting influence on it (8).

As we will continue to see in the rest of the chapter, the uncritical merger between faithfulness to the Reformed theology and loyalty to the Afrikaner *volk* as sketched in historical narratives had a big impact on the DRC's imagination, rationality and sense of justice and community.

## 5.4. Afrikaner liturgy

As pointed out above, widespread commemoration fever started with the 1938 centenary of the Great Trek. This section takes a closer look at some of the commemorations

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<sup>528</sup> We desire the collaboration, but then with the *Hervormde Kerk* that originated in 1853 in the Transvaal. In fact, before this such a Church did not exist – not our country!

<sup>529</sup> If the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is viewed in light of its merit and achievements, with emphasis on everything it did to honour its lineage, the nation in which it serves on social, educational and cultural terrain, then it could indeed point at its impressive past, which points to gratefulness in more than one respect.



announced and discussed in *Die Kerkbode* from 1948 onward. They are worth noting and probing because they go one step further than the preoccupation with historiography discussed in the previous section: this is history re-enacted. It calls upon specific people to gather at specific times and places, to commemorate and celebrate in specific ways, and to hope for specific things.

In his book *How Societies Remember* (1989), Paul Connerton draws special attention to commemorative ceremonies. For him, as for many memory scholars, “our experiences of the present largely depend on our knowledge of the past, and ... our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order” (Connerton, 1989: 136).<sup>530</sup> For Connerton, it is important not to speak about memory metaphysically, but to ask where and how it is created, transferred and sustained – specifically when it comes to collective memory. When we study collective memory (or for him, social memory), he argues, we have to ask where it is to be found, where it is most crucially operative, and how the memory of groups is conveyed and sustained (Connerton, 1989: 1). Connerton continues:

If there is such a thing as social memory, I shall argue, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies; but commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms (158).

Following Connerton, we can therefore say that commemorations have a ritualistic aspect to them and, accordingly, a mnemonic power that is of a different order of merely being *reminded* of something. It is more often than not a very real and emotion-laden *representation* of “mythic events”, and participants embody this ceremonially. Moreover, Connerton argues, rites are not limited in their effect to the ritual occasion (960-974):

But whatever is demonstrated in rites permeates also non-ritual behaviour and mentality. Although demarcated in time and space, rites are also as it were porous. They are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with respect to a set of further non-ritual actions, to the whole of life of a community. Rites have the capacity to give value and meaning to the life of those who perform them (974).

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<sup>530</sup> The Kindle edition of Connerton’s book was used. The numbers in brackets therefore refers to locations in the electronic text, and not to page numbers.

Through acts performed at a sacred site, the illusion of mundane time is suspended (951). These sites become places where temporal distance is denied and the existence of the same, “the true” and “authentic” reality is repeatedly disclosed (935).

*Die Kerkbode*’s discussion of the celebration of “Heldedag” in 1945 serves as a good example of this mentality. The commemoration is specifically set out as an event during which the celebrants can “part with the material world” and focus their attention on that which is “everlasting and immortal” (Editorial, 1945a: 354).

The myths of Afrikaner nationalism and their religious nature are well-known and criticised. But *how* they came to be so highly influential and uniting in a community that was tormented by much dissent is worth analysing. The basic albeit complex question is how ideology takes hold of people. In their article “The changing fortunes of great trek mythology” (2009), Grundlingh and Sapire asks an even more specific question: why were the masses more susceptible to the culturalist nationalist appeals (of the ‘second Trek’, for example) (see 5.4.2.), as opposed to the attractions of other competing ideologies like socialism and South Africanism? (Grundlingh & Sapire, 2009: 26-27). For them, the answer lies in the essential communal past that was available to claimants of nationalist culture to refract and rework (27). Connerton, however, takes it one step further. For him, the moment when “recollection and bodies” overlap – as one sees in commemorative rituals – is an exceptionally powerful one (Connerton, 1989: 135).<sup>531</sup> Nationalist culturalists not only evoked a heroic communal past, but also organised peoples’ participation in it. Moreover, it came during a phase which Grundlingh and Sapire calls “populist” (2009: 27). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the late 1930s and 1940s had all the rhetoric of populist movements: struggle, survival and salvation (27).<sup>532</sup>

This section highlights the profound role of commemorative ceremonies in the shaping of the DRC’s identity. It focuses on the most prominent of these commemorations as discussed in *Die Kerkbode* between 1948 and 1963.

For the sake of sketching a thorough picture of the prevalence of commemoration at the time, however, the following commemorations must also be mentioned: there was the

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<sup>531</sup> The shortcoming of many attempts to understand recollection as a cultural activity, Connerton holds, lies in the fact that it focuses on that which has been *inscribed* (Connerton, 1989: 135). Despite the different things that can be interpreted as “text” by hermeneutics (including bodily practices), it tends to take inscription as its privileged object (135).

<sup>532</sup> Grundlingh and Sapire’s description of populism also includes other important and recognisable features: “a moralistic rather than a programmatic content; a romantic, consciously anti-intellectual and deliberately *de-classed* leadership; an overt alienation from the centres of political and economic power; the launching of co-operative economic ventures, involving the ‘small man,’ such as the Reddingsdaadbond; and a strong nostalgic element in drawing upon an idealised past in attempts to help shape the present and the future” (Grundlingh & Sapire, 2009: 27).

custom of celebrating every twenty-five years of a congregation's existence, resulting in abundant announcements of and joyful reports on quarter-centenary, half-centenary, three-quarter-centenary and centenary celebrations in congregations all over the country. Over and above these commemorations (and the ones we will discuss below), there were also a significant number of other commemorations: in May 1949, the centenary of Andrew Murray's ordination in Bloemfontein was celebrated by the congregation in Wellington<sup>533</sup> with various articles about it in *Die Kerkbode*<sup>534</sup>; the centenary of *Die Kerkbode* itself was also celebrated in 1949, with articles recounting the entire DRC history of that period<sup>535</sup>; in 1953, the 150th anniversary of the Bible Society was celebrated together with the 20th anniversary of the Bible in Afrikaans<sup>536</sup>; in 1956, 500 years of the printed Bible was celebrated<sup>537</sup>; in 1958, 25 years of the Bible in Afrikaans is celebrated<sup>538</sup>; in 1949, 90 years of the *Kweekskool* is celebrated<sup>539</sup>, and in 1959, its centenary<sup>540</sup>; and in 1960 the half-centenary of the Union of South Africa.<sup>541</sup>

#### 5.4.1. Pentecost

Despite the prominence of the memory of the Liberal Struggle (of the 1860s) in the 1930s, the decades thereafter seem to have been pervaded by another memory from the 1860s: the spiritual awakening and the coinciding start of special Pentecost prayer meetings in the DRC. As early as 1956, it is announced that the centenary of the awakening will be celebrated in a "fitting manner" in 1960 and 1961 (Editorial, 1956b: 309). One also gets the idea that an expectation of a new awakening lay at the heart of the idea:

Dit sal nie alleen gepas wees nie, maar kan onder die seënende hand van God  
'n geleentheid skep tot 'n nuwe openbaring van sy genade, as 'n deeglike

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<sup>533</sup> "Soos reeds bekendgemaak, sal die Kerkraad van die gemeente Wellington die dae 6-8 Mei vanjaar by wyse van 'n geestelike konferensie feestelik waarneem ten einde die intrede in die evangelie-bediening van die gevierde kerkleier, Andrew Murray, 'n honderd jaar gelede te gedenk" (Gerdener, 1949: 122). Among the things mentioned by Gerdener, in what was only a short announcement of the event, is the sermon of Andrew Murray delivered on Pentecost, 7 June 1908, from Exodus 14: 5: "'Sê vir die kinders van Israel dat hulle moet wegtrek,' het destyds 'n onvergeetlike indruk gemaak en bevat nou nog 'n boodskap" (123).

<sup>534</sup> See Moller 1949: 1242ff and Van der Merwe 1949a: 18-21.

<sup>535</sup> See Hanekom 1949a: 12-14; Hanekom 1949b: 61-64; Hanekom 1949c: 110ff.; Hanekom 1949d: 167-170; Editorial 1949c: 159-160; Muller 1949: 171-173; Uit die Vrystaat 1949b: 187ff.

<sup>536</sup> See Editorial 1953a: 300.

<sup>537</sup> See Editorial 1956a: 790.

<sup>538</sup> See Bruwer 1957: 635ff.; Editorial 1958a: 5; Editorial 1958b: 324.

<sup>539</sup> See Editorial 1949d: 850-853; Kies 1949: 930-931.

<sup>540</sup> See Editorial 1953b: 710; Van der Merwe 1953a: 710-711; Editorial 1957a: 1044; Editorial 1959b: 658; Keet 1959: 659ff; Vorster 1959: 664ff; Classen 1959: 704-705

<sup>541</sup> See Editorial 1960a: 36; Pinksteronderwerpe 1960: 567-576; Meyer 1960: 408; Haasbroek 1960: 933.

voorbereiding met die oog op die viering van die eeufees aangepak word<sup>542</sup> (309).

The DRC's way and history of celebrating Pentecost deserves thorough study and analysis. However, for our purposes, too, it presents an interesting phenomenon, as the DRC tradition to celebrate Pentecost with a series of ten prayer meetings originated in the early 1860s. As discussed in chapter 3, the so-called Liberal Struggle coincided with a spiritual awakening, and the two events were not regarded as unrelated. In troubling theological times, God's blessing and hand were seen in the arrival of the awakening.

The yearning for a new spiritual awakening in the DRC is explicitly<sup>543</sup> and implicitly present in this period<sup>544</sup> (De Jager, 1955: 158), as is the opinion that the DRC has the "means" and "methods" to obtain an awakening. De Jager (1955: 158) disapproves of the search for "human wisdom", "greater knowledge" and "fiery preachers" in "faraway countries."<sup>545</sup> According to him, "we have the men" and all that is needed is "the simple way of intercession instead of studying the methods of other countries" (158). The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 also fuelled the idea inside the DRC that a spiritual awakening is an important aspect of solving South Africa's problems (Editorial, 1960b: 613). Although *Die Kerkbode* called this naive "wêreldontvlugting"<sup>546</sup> and argues that the "intricate pattern of the modern society" requires more knowledge and practical wisdom, it acknowledges the significance that a revival could have:

Laat ons dadelik erken dat 'n herlewing in ons Christelike godsdiens oneindig veel sou beteken vir die maatskaplike en politieke lewe van ons land. Waar die liefde van Christus heers, word menslike verhoudings gesuiwer van kwaadwilligheid en haat, vooroordeel en wantroue, hoogmoed en naywer en dergelike ondermynende gesindhede. Hierdie suiwering het ons vandag bitter nodig. En waar hierdie gesindheid, saam met kennis van die eise van Gods Woord vir die menslike samelewing, die gewete en denke van ons wetgewers

<sup>542</sup> It will not only be fitting, but can create an opportunity under the benedictory hand of God for a new revelation of his grace, if a thorough preparation is undertaken with the celebration of the centenary as goal.

<sup>543</sup> "Meer as een Christen voel dat geestelike herlewing ons ons tans broodnodig is. Godsdiens en kerklike organisasies het ons wel; wat ons nie het nie is die vuur van die Heilige Gees. Ons besef ons moet iets doen om dit te verkry... Ons kom net die vuur van Bo kort. Om dit te verkry, is dit nodig dat ons gebede dag en nag in alle ootmoed tot God sal opgaan. Wanneer die voorbidders die vuur ontvang het, steek hulle ander daarmee aan" (De Jager 1955: 158).

<sup>544</sup> In the time of the Du Plessis-case, too, a revival was proposed by some as a solution to the conflict.

<sup>545</sup> William Branham visited South Africa in 1953 (Allen 2005: 213ff.). Billy Graham only visited in 1973, but he and his refusal to come to South Africa earlier is much-discussed in *Die Kerkbode* in the 1950s.

<sup>546</sup> "world escapism"

beheers, kan ons seker wees dat dit ook in baie opsigte groot invloed sal hê op praktiese wetgewing vir die land<sup>547</sup> (613).

However, the importance of Pentecost was not only emphasised at the time of the 1960/1961 commemoration of the revival of the 1860s. Pentecost was an extremely important event every year. This is evident from the numerous reflections on the annual Pentecost prayer meetings, and the longing for awakening<sup>548</sup> that is present in the articles published in *Die Kerkbode*. Pentecost is said to be a time characterised by a “spirit of anticipation” (Editorial, 1949e: 1237),<sup>549</sup> and a time when congregants open their hearts to the “frisste verkwikking van Gods seëning”<sup>550</sup> in a time when there is more of a need for it “than perhaps ever before” (Editorial, 1954a: 703). The blessing that has been received before is expected to come again (703) and there are prayers that Pentecost “shall take hold of us with its power” (Editorial, 1954b: 742). Pentecost is portrayed as something “[wat ons moet] losruk uit die sleurgang van ons alledaagse lewe en ons aanvuur met die lewensgloed van die Heilige Gees”<sup>551</sup> (742). In 1959, the official theme of the prayer-meetings was “Revival.”<sup>552</sup>

The annual celebration of Pentecost was not approached in a haphazard way, but the question of how congregants were to prepare (Kotzé, 1953: 326-327; Bam 1959: 672-674; Joubert, 1959: 677-679) for and participate (Treurnicht, 1953: 532-533; Treurnicht, 1959: 665-666) in the celebration of Pentecost was treated with solemnity. There was a seriousness connected to Pentecost, as it was a celebration that confronted one’s conscience (Van Tonder, 1953: 540-541; Malan, 1953: 658ff.; Editorial, 1956c: 740; Kotzé, 1959: 663ff.). There is also much talk and discussion about the lasting impact that Pentecost should have on the church.<sup>553</sup> It is often bemoaned and questioned (Hanekom, 1951b: 1052; Editorial, 1953c: 84; Wil graag weet, 1953: 101; Editorial, 1959c: 836; Editorial, 1959d: 788) that the annual prayer meetings generate such intense

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<sup>547</sup> Let us acknowledge immediately that a revival in our Christian religion would mean an immense amount to the social and political life of our country. Where the love of Christ rules, relationships are purged of malice and hatred, prejudice and mistrust, pride and envy and similar subversive attitudes. We desperately need this purge today. And where these attitudes, alongside knowledge of the demands of God’s Word for society, rule the conscience and thoughts of our lawmakers, we can be certain that it will also in many respects have great influence on practical legislation for the country.

<sup>548</sup> *Die Kerkbode* had an annual “Pentecost edition.” However, articles on Pentecost were published for weeks after the event, and congregations often reported on what a blessed Pentecost they had.

<sup>549</sup> See also Du Toit 1951: 886-887 and Editorial 1958c: 724.

<sup>550</sup> “fresh nourishment of God’s blessing”

<sup>551</sup> “which we should break loose from our everyday humdrum and inspire us with the Holy Spirit’s glow of life”

<sup>552</sup> The “Kommissie vir gebedsonderwerpe” was responsible for an annual theme with a 10-day programme for the prayer meetings.

<sup>553</sup> This is also reflected in the official theme of 1958: “’n Blywende Pinksterseën”.

participation that does not correspond to general church attendance. Hence, what happens *after* Pentecost and the importance of avoiding slump were as important as the celebration of Pentecost itself (Editorial, 1952a: 1110; Editorial, 1953d: 676; Treurnicht, 1954: 644ff; Alheit, 1956: 852ff.; Vrystaatse medewerker, 1957: 9; Van Dyk, 1957: 33; Loots, 1957: 69; Cronjé, 1958a: 633; Cronjé, 1958b: 1039ff; Cronjé, 1960: 857-859; Editorial, 1960c: 885; De Villiers, 1961: 493-495; Kommissie vir gebedsonderwerpe, 1961: 498-499).

The annual celebration of Pentecost was also fuelled from a historical consciousness and pride within the DRC. It is often mentioned that the DRC is the only church in the world that celebrates Pentecost in this special way (Hanekom, 1951b: 1052; 1956: 840). Furthermore, the history of its origin is regularly mentioned, even outside the period of official commemoration of the centenary in 1960 and 1961 (Kommissie vir Gebedsonderwerpe, 1952: 1033ff.; Editorial, 1952b: 1062; Hanekom, 1953: 522 ff.; Du Toit, 1958: 731-732). The Pentecost of 1952 which coincided with the *Van Riebeeckfees* tercentenary (see 5.4.4.) is singled out as an occasion from which something special was expected (Editorial, 1952b: 1062):

Die gedagtes wat die derde eeufees by ons volk opgewek het, die nuwe lig wat daar vir ons opgegaan het oor ons land en ons volksverlede - alles het daartoe meegewerk dat ons ook op geestelike gebied besondere verwagtinge begin koester het. En toe die tienduisende saamdrom in die stadion en met stralende entoesiasme die program begroet dag na dag - toe het daar by meer as een, ook by die diensknegte van die Here, 'n hunkerende verlange gekom dat net sulke groot skares sal toestroom op die kerkdeure om daar met brandende heilsverlange te soek na die koninkryk van God<sup>554</sup> (1062).

Nevertheless, there is a warning not to confuse the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of God – “our *Van Riebeeckfees* has no natural connection with our Pentecost” (1062).

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<sup>554</sup> The thoughts that were inspired in our nation by the tercentenary, the light that rised over our country and our nation's past – everything contributed to us starting to entertain extraordinary expectations on spiritual terrain. And when the tens of thousands crowded together in the stadium and greeted the programme day after day with gleaming enthusiasm – then an eager yearning came about in more than one person, also in the servants of the Lord, that such large crowds will also throng at the church doors to search there with a burning desire for salvation for the kingdom of God.

#### 5.4.2. The inauguration of the Voortrekker monument, 1949

Fuelled by the centenary of the *Great Trek* in 1938,<sup>555</sup> the history of the *Voortrekkers* occupied a special place in the memory of the Afrikaners and also the DRC,<sup>556</sup> as the reflections on this history in *Die Kerkbode* show. The 1938 commemoration has been studied by various scholars.<sup>557</sup> This event was mainly commemorated by a symbolic ox wagon trek. The trek consisted of nine ox wagons and, “by popular demand, almost 500 centres in South Africa were visited” (Grundlingh and Sapire, 1989: 20).<sup>558</sup> According to Moodie, the “wagons were baptised at historically significant points en route and given names appropriate to the major themes of the sacred history” (Moodie, 1975: 178). In each town the Dutch Reformed minister was asked to appoint a committee for arranging the reception of the wagons and for obtaining oxen from local farmers (Moodie, 1975: 177). The climax of the event, 16 December 1938, saw more than 200 000 Afrikaners gathering “to listen to rousing speeches honouring the *Voortrekkers*, and at the same time proclaiming a new-found unity and a bright future for the *volk*” (Grundlingh and Sapire, 20). Two big festivals were held on this day: one at the site of the Battle of Blood River and the other in Pretoria where the cornerstone of the new Voortrekker Monument was laid (Moodie, 1975: 178).

In his speech with the take-off of the first two wagons on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1938, Henning Klopper called upon his fellow Afrikaners to “build up a monument for Afrikaner hearts” hoping that “this simple trek [will] bind together in love those Afrikaner hearts which do not yet beat together” (Moodie, 1975: 178).<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> According to Grundlingh and Sapire (1989), this centenary assumed “such dimensions as to constitute an important historical milestone in itself. In the annals of twentieth-century Afrikaner history, though, the 1938 centenary celebrations of the Great Trek rank alongside such events as the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, the Boer rebellion of 1914-15, the National Party victory of 1948 and the establishment of a republic in 1961” (1989: 19).

<sup>556</sup> Three “remarkable places” of the history of the *Voortrekkers* are said to be *Vegkop*, *Moordspruit* and *Bloedrivier*, and it is stated that all these places are owned by the DRC in the different provinces (Uit Natal, 1948: 187).

<sup>557</sup> See for example Messina 1938: 140ff, Mostert 1940: 37ff, Van Jaarsveld 1988: 13, Van Rensburg 1972:12-46.

<sup>558</sup> Moodie notes that enthusiasm for the proposed trek was not that big at first, but contagious once it started (1975: 178).

<sup>559</sup> Moodie aptly conveys the ritualistic and embodied character of this event: “Every Afrikaner I interviewed, of whatever political persuasion, recalled the events and activities of the 1938 centenary with deeply personal intensity. The sacred history was constituted and actualized as a general context of meaning for all Afrikanerdom in spontaneous liturgical re-enactment during the 1938 celebrations. Passionate enthusiasm seized Afrikaans-speaking South Africa. Men grew beards and women donned Voortrekker dress; street after street in hamlet after hamlet was renamed after one or another Trek hero; babies were baptized in the shade of the wagons – one was christened ‘Euufeesia’ (best translated



In 1948, the tenth commemoration of the centenary is celebrated – also in anticipation of the inauguration of the *Voortrekker* monument in Pretoria in 1949.<sup>560</sup> In *Die Kerkbode* of 1948, E.C. Pienaar recalls the events of 1938 as a beacon in history:

Die jaar 1938 sal in ons geskiedenis seker altyd bekend staan as die groot feesjaar van die Boerevolk. Want dit was die jaar van ons eerste Voortrekkereuefees wat sy hoogtepunt bereik het in die luisterryke hoeksteenlegging van die Voortrekkermonument; dit was die jaar van die simboliese Ossewatrek wat so 'n ongekende volksgeesdrif oor die lengte en breedte van ons land gaande gemaak het; dit was die jaar van die simboliese Fakkelloop wat 'n vuurstreep van jeugdige besieling getrek het van Kaapstad en Dingaanstat tot in Pretoria<sup>561</sup> (Pienaar 1948b: 818).

Announcing the programme of this tenth commemoration of 1938, *Die Kerkbode* calls the *Voortrekker* centenary the “greatest festival of our history” (Editorial, 1948a: 255) and one with a lasting impact. The life of the church, too, is said to have experienced the “tremor of that series of big *volk* celebrations” and had a leading role in it (255). The memories of 1938 are compared to the *Voortrekkerfakkel*<sup>562</sup> that continues to burn, and the hope that this will serve “the spiritual purification and consecration” of the church is expressed (255). J.H. Conradie’s declaration – in the opening address of the trek in 1938 – that the centenary would become a “symbol of the triumph of the civilisation in South Africa” is, in hindsight, said to have been “a prophetic word” (Van der Merwe, 1948b: 363-364):

Die simboliek van hierdie trek het die hart en verbeelding van ons volk dermate aangegryp, dat ons vir die oomblik byna vergeet het dat dit maar net die sinnebeeldige voorstelling was van wat honderd jaar gelede plaasgevind het. As herbore het die verlede van ons volk uit sy graf verrys om deur almal

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‘Centennalia’) – and young couples were married in full trekker regalia on the village green before the wagons. With tearful eyes old men and women climbed onto the wagons – ‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,’ said one old man – and the younger ones jostled with one another in their efforts to rub grease from the wagon-axles onto their handkerchiefs. Monuments were raised up and the wagons were pulled through freshly laid concrete so that the imprint of their tracks could be preserved forever” (Moodie 1975: 180).

<sup>560</sup> See Editorial 1949f: 377-378

<sup>561</sup> The year 1938 will probably always be known as the big feast year of the Boer nation. Because it was the year of our first Voortrekker centenary which reached its pinnacle with the magnificent laying of the Voortrekker Monument’s foundation stone; it was the year of the symbolic Ox Wagon Trek which marked such an unprecedented national enthusiasm across the length and width of our country; it was the year of the symbolic Torch Run (“Fakkelloop”) which drew a line of fire of youthful inspiration from Cape Town and Dingane Village to Pretoria.

<sup>562</sup> Voortrekker Torch

toegeëien te word met 'n geesdrif wat geen perke geken het nie en van oud en jonk besit geneem<sup>563</sup> (364).

The harmony, goodwill and surrendering of political and social differences and prejudices that characterised the centenary are remembered as a miracle and depicted in religious imagery:

... asof die ossewaens as apostels van liefde en eensgesindheid gedoen het wat meer as een poging om 'n beter verstandhouding tussen ons volksgenote te bewerk in die verlede nie kon regkry nie ...<sup>564</sup> (364).

It is said to have inspired spontaneously the fervour for the “handhawing en uitbou van ons volkseie”<sup>565</sup> (364). As a result, the symbolic connection that was made to Jan van Riebeeck is also ardently remembered and the ox wagons called “sermon carriers”:

Die waens wat op 8 Augustus 1938 van die standbeeld van Van Riebeeck na die noorde begin rol het, was meer as rytuie waarom heen daar in die loop van die volgende maande van plek tot plek feesgevier sou word - hulle was die draers van 'n prediking wat die harte van ons volksgenote in beroering sou bring en ons, soos niks anders tot hiertoe nog ooit gedoen het nie, bewus sou maak van ons gemeenskaplike liefde vir 'n groot verlede<sup>566</sup> (364).

The message of the wagons is summarised in the words of Deut 32: 7: “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.” In Van der Merwe’s elucidation of this text, the connection between the past, present and future is immediate. Making sense of the present is said to be completely reliant on the past, and the possibility of a future is determined by a people’s “knowing and honouring” of the past. The past and one’s relationship to it are strikingly compared to the mother-child relationship. The past is said to nurture and give guidance like a mother:

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<sup>563</sup> The symbolism of this trek grabbed hold of the heart and imagination of our nation to such a degree that for the moment we almost forgot that it was only the symbolic representation of what happened a hundred years ago. As rebirthed, our nation’s past rised from the grave to be appropriated by everyone with an enthusiasm which knew no bounds and took hold of old and young.

<sup>564</sup> ... as if the ox wagons served as apostles of love and unity that managed to establish a better understanding among our compatriots that more than one attempt in the past could not achieve ...

<sup>565</sup> “maintenance and development of our national identity”

<sup>566</sup> The wagons that started rolling from Van Riebeeck’s statue on 8 August 1938 to the North were more than vehicles around which celebrations would be held from place to place over the course of the following months – they were the carriers of a preaching that would bring excitement to the hearts of our compatriots and would, like nothing else has done until now, make us aware of our communal love for an immense past.

Soos blyk uit hierdie woorde is daar toe reeds besef, dat die verlede van 'n volk iets is wat nie maar sonder meer aan die vergetelheid prysgegee kon word nie. Die verlede, immers, is die moeder van die hede en as sodanig maak dit die agtergrond uit waarop die hede gesien moet word om ten volle verstaan te word. Van sy verlede losgemaak, is die toekoms van 'n volk soos 'n onversorgde weeskind wat niemand het om aan sy ontluikende lewe rigting te gee nie. Om hierdie rede is daar geen toekoms vir 'n mens of 'n volk wat sy verlede nie ken en eer nie<sup>567</sup> (Van der Merwe, 1948b: 364).

In anticipation of the inauguration, the meaning that the monument ought to carry is discussed (Badenhorst, 1949: 904; Van der Merwe, 1949b: 904; Neethling, 1949: 1022; Hanekom, 1949e: 1074). Hanekom criticises the idea that the inauguration would be a mere “landsfees”<sup>568</sup> (Hanekom, 1949e: 1074) and considers the possibility of it being transformed by the Holy Spirit to a moment of “rebirth and repentance for thousands from our nation” (1074). For him, the message of the monument is a compression of all the “noblest ideas from our past” into a token, and this should permeate the life of the *volk* (1074). It should not only excite people, but also bring them to self-reflection and purging of their souls, he writes. People are called not only to *think* about the lives of the fathers, but also to *turn* to the God of the fathers (1074). Here, the metaphor of “the rock whence ye are hewn” (see 5.4.4) is again used:

Hierdie fees rondom die monument kan iets meer, iets heeltemal anders word. As die Here ons gebede verhoor in sy genade, dan kan dit 'n lewewekkende boodskap dra om ons tot selfondersoek en tot inkeer te bring, en ons te laat terugdink aan die rots waaruit ons gekap is. Dit is wat ons Kerk vandag innig begeer. Ons verwag dit nie van die monument nie, maar as 'n genadige geskenk, 'n wonderwerk van die Here wat selfs die stene kan laat spreek as sy getuie. Daarom vra ons dat die kinders van die Here daarom sal *bid*. Hulle het vir ons 'n *volksmonument* gebou en nou begeer ons dat dit 'n *volksaltaar sal wees*. En nooit kan die geloof te veel verwag nie!<sup>569</sup> (1074).

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<sup>567</sup> As is evident from these words, it was realised that a nation's past is not something that can simply be given up to oblivion. The past, after all, is mother to the present and as such it comprises the background against which the present should be viewed to be understood completely. Freed from its past, a nation's future is like a neglected orphan who has no one to give direction to their nascent life. For this reason, there is no future for someone or a nation that does not know and honour their past.

<sup>568</sup> “national festival”

<sup>569</sup> This festival about the monument can become something more, something else, entirely. If the Lord answers our prayers by his grace, it can carry a life-giving message to bring us to self-examination and repentance, and remind us of the rock from which we were cut. This is what our Church desires deeply today. We do not expect it from the monument, but as a merciful gift, a miracle from the Lord who even let the stones cry out as his witness. Therefore, we ask that the Lord's children to pray. They built us a national monument and now we desire it to be a national altar. And never can the faith expect too much.

L.V. Rex who wrote about the inauguration day for *Die Kerkbode* did so not in the style of a report, but “as a reminder of what happened – through the eyes of the Church” (Rex, 1950a: 8). He aimed to “preserve this great moment for the future” by “conveying the mood that was present on the occasion as far as possible” (8). A crowd of 250 000 gathered - the biggest crowd ever to have gathered in South Africa, he writes (8). The event is said to have been characterised by “striking unity, spiritual devotion and religious solemnity” - an “unforgettable event” (Rex, 1950b: 40).

### 5.4.3. Day of the Vow

The celebration of the *Voortrekker*-centenary was linked to the annual commemoration of *Dingane’s Day* on 16 December. During the infamous Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838, the *Voortrekkers* defeated the Zulu King Dingane and his army. In the week before the battle, the *Voortrekkers* made a vow to God that if they win the battle, they will observe the day as a Sabbath and a day of thanksgiving. Although this commemoration had its origin in 1838, it only gradually became a widespread annual event.<sup>570</sup> However, in 1864<sup>571</sup> through the mediation of reverends D.P.M. Huet and F.L. Cachet, it became a churchly holiday in Natal (Bailey, 2006: 6). Thereafter, commemoration of it in churchly circles grew in Natal as well as in Transvaal, and later also in the Free State (6). In the last quarter of the 19th century, 16 December was characterised by a variety of commemorations: home celebrations, congregational celebrations, commemorations of specific denominations, state festivals and celebrations organised by communities themselves (7). From around 1887, the official organisation of commemorations became more important, and committees and commissions were elected to organise proper events (7). It was only in 1910 that an act was passed by Parliament stipulating that 16 December would become an official national holiday celebrated as Dingane’s Day as from 1911 (2). In 1952, the Public Holidays Act (Act 5 of 1952) was passed by the National Party and 16 December was declared a religious public holiday. This meant that certain activities were banned – organised sports and theatre shows, for example. The name of the commemoration also changed from Dingane’s Day

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<sup>570</sup> Bailey states that it was probably at first only celebrated in homes and in smaller groups (2006: 6). For a detailed discussion of the construction of this history, see Van Jaarsveld (1980: 8-59).

<sup>571</sup> The first official commemoration of this event under the name *Dingane’s Day* took place in 1910, and in 1911 it became a public holiday. However, the Transvaal government already proclaimed it a public holiday in 1865, and officials of the Free State in 1894. Today 16 December is still a public holiday in South Africa, now called Day of Reconciliation. The ambiguity of 16 December in South African history is further marked by the fact that uMkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress, launched its first acts of sabotage on the Apartheid State on 16 December 1961.

to *Geloftedag* (“Day of the Covenant” or “Day of the Vow”). The new name was meant to be less offensive (Bailey, 6; Van Jaarsveld, 1980: 12), but also emphasised the vow rather than the Zulu protagonist. Our overview of *Die Kerkbode*’s discussion of the Day of the Covenant<sup>572</sup> should therefore be seen against the backdrop of a commemoration with a longer history of development. The announcement of the commemoration of the Day of the Covenant of 1948<sup>573</sup> includes references to the discussion about this day held in 1864 by a presbytery meeting in Natal (Uit Natal, 1948: 187-188). Reflecting on this episode, *Die Kerkbode* writes:

So was die volksgeskiedenis en die Kerkgeskiedenis in Natal deureengevleg en onlosmaakbaar vasgeweef. Die volk het die Kerk langs die trekp pad saamgedra. Kerk en volk was so een dat wat die een wederveraar het, ook die ander een getref het<sup>574</sup> (187).

This convergence of church history and *volk* history is again emphasised in the call to participate in the commemoration:

Kom dan, laat ons dankbare nageslag vanjaar seker saamkom - al is dit met groot moeite en geweldige opoffering - op daardie bloedbesprengde vaderlandsgrond wat vir ons Kerk en ons volk van soveel kerklike en historiese betekenis is<sup>575</sup> (188).

The meaning and appropriate<sup>576</sup> celebration of the Day of the Covenant was an ever-present topic of discussion.<sup>577</sup> It is remembered not only as a fact of history, but also as a miracle of the grace of *our* God (Groenewald, 1948: 785). But there was said to be a real danger that the day may be “robbed of its true meaning” (Editorial, 1953f: 924) and this

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<sup>572</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will henceforth refer to the commemoration of 16 December as *Day of the Covenant* even when it refers to events prior to 1952.

<sup>573</sup> The *Day of the Covenant* was celebrated annually nationwide, with a special celebration at the site of the battle every five years. 1948 marked such a special celebration.

<sup>574</sup> The people’s history and the Church’s history in Natal were intertwined and inseparably interwoven like this. The people carried the Church with them along the path they travelled. The Church and the people were one to such an extent that what the one experienced affected the other.

<sup>575</sup> Come then, let our grateful descendants come together – even though it is with great effort and immense sacrifice – on that blood-sprinkled land of the fatherland which is of so much churchly and historical meaning to our Church and our people/nation.

<sup>576</sup> According to Bailey, criticism of festival programmes, speeches and the way 16 December was spent was already widespread in the media in the late 19th century. See Bailey (2006: 8-9).

<sup>577</sup> See Pauw 1953: 772; Editorial 1953e: 36; Kruger 1954: 270; Dreyer 1954: 577; Cillié 1954: 754-755; Cadle 1954: 805; Heymann 1954: 887; Barnardt 1955: 150; Aanbevelings van die Geloftedagkommissie van S.A. 1955: 770ff.; Blignaut 1956: 344; Van Niekerk 1956: 344-345; Editorial 1957b: 1076; M.J. v. S. 1958: 127; Editorial 1958d: 1028; Heyns 1959: 90-91; Moller 1959: 273; Hay 1959: 273; Du Plooy 1959: 351-353; Editorial 1958e: 229; Van Zyl 1959: 401; Retief 1959: 935; Editorial 1959e: 964; Keet 1959: 965ff.; Visser 1959: 972-975.

was to be guarded against. For the 1953 celebration, a special publication was prepared to help everybody to answer appropriately to the exalted goal of this day (Editorial, 1953g: 565; Editorial, 1953h: 825). It comprised various narratives and articles about the *Great Trek*, the *Voortrekker* women, the Day of the Covenant, various psalms, hymns, and folk songs, and interesting perspectives on the future of the Afrikaner (565; 825).

Two examples from 1959 suffice to show the breadth of meaning that this day had for Afrikaners. The first is a letter to *Die Kerkbode* by P.J. Retief (Retief, 1959: 953). For him, the Day of the Covenant makes the Afrikaner into a special people, as there “is no other *volk* on earth that has such a day of devotion” (953). He also seems to regard it as the cornerstone of Afrikaners’ religious devotion, for “if we neglect this day”, he writes, “soon we will also not celebrate Sundays anymore” (953). The list of things related to the Day of the Covenant continues for him: it should be commemorated in more practical ways, he holds, and this would ask of the Afrikaner to become a “Bible-loving and church-loving *volk* again”, to be more diligent when it comes to house services (“*boekevat*”), to make less debt, to be an example to children, and to help “my medebroer geestelik op die pad van S.A.”<sup>578</sup> (953).

A second example from 1959 comes from *Die Kerkbode*’s issue of 16 December 1959. This issue attributed seven of its twelve articles to the Day of the Covenant. The foundation of the commemoration is said to be “the belief that it is God who determines the fate of nations as an essential part of his counsel” (Editorial, 1959e: 964). In an article by D.J. Keet (1959: 965ff), reference is made to a brochure by J.S. de Wet titled *Geloftefees – ’n Seën of Vloek vir die Afrikanervolk?* Here the meaning of the *Day of the Covenant* for the Afrikaners is compared to the meaning of the Sabbath for the Jews – something that distinguishes a covenant people from heathens:

[S]ó is die viering van Geloftedag ’n teken wat die Afrikanervolk onderskei van die ander volke van die wêreld as die enigste volk van die teenswoordige tydsbedeling wat in ’n heilige verbond met die Drieënige God van hemel en aarde getree het. Ons het ’n verbondsvolk geword, want God het dit bevestig deur (met eerbied gesê) Sy kant van die ooreenkoms te vervul in die oorwinning van Bloedrivier<sup>579</sup> (965).

Keet does not hesitate to discuss the lack of observance of the vow that characterised the

<sup>578</sup> “my neighbour spiritually on the path of S.A.”

<sup>579</sup> In this way, the celebration of the Day of the Covenant is a sign that differentiates the Afrikaner nation from other nations in the world as the only nation to have entered into a holy covenant with the Holy Trinity of heaven and earth in the present. We became a covenant nation, as God confirmed it by (with respect) fulfilling His side of the bargain in the victory of Blood River.

church during the first decades after 1838 (966). He is also critical of the conflation of religious festivals and *volk* festivals, and also highlights J.S. de Wet's denunciation of "volkstrots"<sup>580</sup> and "nasiebou"<sup>581</sup> associated with the Day of the Covenant (965-966). He highlights the various occasions throughout history when the Day of the Covenant was conflated with patriotism and gained new enthusiasm. This, he states, was particularly the case when the Day of the Covenant was associated with crises or turning points in the life of the Afrikaners: the hoisting of the *Vierkleur*<sup>582</sup> flag at Heidelberg on 16 December 1880 with the start of the First South African War, the festival of thanksgiving at Paardekraal on 13–16 December 1881 (in the aftermath of the Battle of Majuba), the funeral of Paul Kruger in Pretoria on 16 December 1904, the unveiling of the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein on 16 December 1912, the funeral of M.T. Steyn in Bloemfontein on 16 December 1916, the laying of the cornerstone of the *Voortrekker* Monument in Pretoria on 16 December 1938, the inauguration of the *Voortrekker* Monument on 16 December 1949.

Although Keet describes the Day of the Covenant as "ons Volksfees by uitnemendheid",<sup>583</sup> he points to "complicated content" that has been added to the meaning of it, and "tremendous new tensions and ideals that were not yet known in the days of Blood River" (966). He does not explicate these complications, tensions or ideals but states that the church should "continually give account of its participation in *volk* festivals and guard against it that its character as Church of Christ is being compromised in some or other way" (966). However, he is duly aware of the various difficulties that come with implementing this approach:

Immers, wat kerklik is moet die amptelike stempel van die Kerk kan dra en dit kan kwalik by 'n Volksfees, waar uit die aard van die saak faktore soos heldeverering, nasiebou nie geweer kan word nie en waar selfs party-politiek moontlik 'n rol kan speel. Buitendien is 'n volksfees vir Jan en Alleman toeganklik – ook sektemense, buitekerklikies, kerkvervreemdes, selfs ongelowiges, mense wat van die Kerk as sodanig nie gediend is nie. By ons is daar gelukkig geen sprake van Volkskerk en nog minder van Staatskerk, anders was die probleem miskien nie so lastig nie. As een bepaalde Kerk sy stempel op Geloftedag afdruk, sal die volkskarakter van die fees moeilik gehandhaaf kan word. Noodwendig sal dit lei tot seksionele en kerkistiese feeste, waarby die vrug en inspirasie van groot volksaamtrekke gemis word.

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<sup>580</sup> "national pride"

<sup>581</sup> "nation building"

<sup>582</sup> Four-colour

<sup>583</sup> "Our Nation's Festival par excellence"



Deur die ‘kerklike’ te beklemtoon, kan die volksfees versnipper en ontaard<sup>584</sup> (966).

A good solution to all these difficulties, for Keet, is the establishment of a “General Dingaen’s Day Commission” on which all three (white) Afrikaans churches and the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge* (FAK) were represented (966). This commission would be able to set certain standards for the celebration of the Day of the Covenant.

#### 5.4.4. *Van Riebeeck tercentenary, 1952*

The significance of the annual celebration of Van Riebeeck Day on 6 April had been alluded to above. Over and above the annual celebration, 1952 saw a big nationwide celebration of the third centenary of the arrival of Van Riebeeck at the Cape. Although this was not by definition a churchly celebration, the DRC attended to the “churchly and religious aspect” of this celebration (Venter, 1951a: 444ff.; Editorial, 1951c: 1053; Van der Westhuizen, 1951: 1292; Geldenhuys, 1951: 973ff.; Geldenhuys, 1952: 111). It was approached with much enthusiasm and the Council of the Churches appointed an official committee for the task. The brochure<sup>585</sup> published by the committee was aimed at being a “wake-up call to the whole *volk*” to ensure that they see the commemoration in “the right light and participate in it to the glory of God” (Geldenhuys, 1952: 111). The distribution of the brochure is said to be of “vital importance” (111).

The celebration was sketched as a time for the church to “look back with gratitude on the path that God showed” and also to do some stocktaking (Du Toit, 1951: 4). The church that arrived with Van Riebeeck is said to be the church stemming from the Synod of Dordt – “’n kleinood wat deur ons hier te lande vandag nog as ’n skat bewaar word”<sup>586</sup> (4). The commemoration is a time where the church has to ask herself whether she still carries

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<sup>584</sup> After all, that which is churchly should be able to carry the official stamp of the Church and this could barely occur at a National festival, where hero worship, nation building naturally cannot be prevented and where even party politics can play a role. Besides, a national festival is more accessible to the average Joe – also people of sects, without denomination, alienated from church, even infidels, people who are not satisfied by the Church as such. With us, there are luckily no mention of National Church or State Church, otherwise the problem might not have been such a nuisance. If a particular Church made its mark on the Day of the Covenant, the national character of the festival will be maintained with difficulty. It will necessarily lead to sectist and churchist festivals, where the fruit and inspiration of large national rallies will be missed. By emphasising the ‘churchly’, the national festival will become fragmented and deteriorated.

<sup>585</sup> The title of the brochure is “ONS BOU ’N NASIE - Die aandeel van die N.G. Kerk in die bou van die Afrikanervolk.”

<sup>586</sup> “a jewel which is still preserved by us who are here today as a treasure”

“die merktekens van die rots waaruit ons gekap is”<sup>587</sup> (4). The need and possibility of reform and revival in this very time is underscored, and the third centenary is earmarked as a time to confront the “tugloosheid” (lack of discipline) that has come to characterise the church.

One of the focus points of the commemoration was the so-called “prayer of Van Riebeeck” to which the DRC traced its historical continuity with the settlement. The disagreement among historians about the prayer is mentioned, and the need to reach clarity about it as soon as possible expressed (Venter, 1951b: 723). In conjunction with that, Van Riebeeck’s religiosity is defended against those who depicts him otherwise (723). Van Riebeeck is honoured as someone who was a “begenadigde mens ... ’n hoogstaande mens, en sy godsdienstige en sedelike beginsels het opgekom uit die wortel van die ware geloof”<sup>588</sup> (723). His prayer is therefore remembered as one that the Afrikaner *volk* can “still take on their lips and keep in their hearts” (723) and “in the light of this prayer” the *volk* was called upon to “return to and faithfully maintain its spiritual inheritance” (Geldenhuys, 1952: 111).

The commemoration was seen to provide an apt opportunity for evangelising the people and the focus was on the “spiritual uplifting and equipping” of people “for the hard times that lay ahead” (Geldenhuys, 1952: 111).

## 5.5. Memories of the Heidelberg Catechism: 1949-1963

In this section, memories of the Heidelberg Catechism between 1949 and 1963 are presented and analysed. The celebration of the fourth centenary of the Catechism is only addressed in the next section.

Memories of the Catechism in this period is generally characterised by a lament of the lack of interest in the Catechism that was observed.

One finds widespread discussions about the neglect of Catechism preaching and its supposed dryness and lack of appeal. This tendency was said to cause harm to congregations (Editorial, 1952c: 870; C.H.K., 1953: 285; Editorial, 1953i: 4; Loots, 1957: 72; Editorial, 1958f: 1109; Editorial, 1948b: 1156). It was also presented as an explanation

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<sup>587</sup> “the marks of the rock from which we were cut”

<sup>588</sup> “pardoned man ... an outstanding man, and his religious and moral principles emerged from the root of the true faith”

of why things were so grim:

Vergun my nog 'n paar redes by te voeg waarom sake so droewig met ons gesteld is. Een rede is dat so baie min van ons lidmate die voorreg het om selfs een maal in hul lewe agtereenvolgens die behandeling van die Kategismus in die huis van die Here gereeld by te woon<sup>589</sup> (C.H.K., 1953: 285).

A 1950 article by T.N. Hanekom reports similar failures and widespread slackness regarding Catechism preaching, threatening to become a “chronic phenomenon” (Hanekom, 1950: 890). Hanekom, moreover, views the severity of this failure to treat the Catechism with the reverence it deserves as unparalleled in the DRC’s history (890).

Hanekom’s explanation for this phenomenon is interesting. He sympathises with ministers who are guilty of neglect regarding Catechism preaching on the grounds of all the “eise van die kerkjaar”<sup>590</sup> (890) and, in addition to that, all the “special days” that ministers have to attend to. Because of all the demands on the “gemeentelike erediens”,<sup>591</sup> Catechism preaching is very difficult and sometimes even impossible. The “kanselarbeid”<sup>592</sup> of the minister, Hanekom states, is under a lot of pressure (890).

This point is also made by J.J.R. in 1953 when he writes a letter about Catechism preaching to *Die Kerkbode* (J.J.R., 1953: 871). “Our entire annual calendar is now divided into so many different sorts of Sundays”, he writes, “for example children, youth, student Sunday, Mother’s day, and even police and city council Sunday – each outstanding in itself – that very few Bible study or church teaching Sundays remain” (871). In addition, in 1958, an editorial of *Die Kerkbode* likewise argues that the many official duties of a minister put Catechism preaching at risk (Editorial, 1958f: 1109).

Furthermore, Hanekom asserts that not only ministers carry the blame for Catechism neglect, but also congregants.<sup>593</sup> There is prevailing “Catechism aversion” (Hanekom, 1950: 890) that makes it hard for ministers to confidently preach the Catechism.

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<sup>589</sup> Allow me to add yet a few more reasons why things are so grim with us. One reason is that so few of our members even have the privilege to consecutively attend the discussion of the Catechism in the house of the Lord.

<sup>590</sup> “demands of the church year”

<sup>591</sup> “congregational sermons”

<sup>592</sup> “pulpit labour”

<sup>593</sup> In 1958, J.C. Lombard also argues that elders have the responsibility to confront and reprimand ministers when they do not preach on the Heidelberg Catechism frequently enough (Lombard, 1958: 79). Hanekom also mentions the responsibility of the church council in this regard (Hanekom, 1950: 890).

Congregants attend these sermons with “koue onverskilligheid”<sup>594</sup> (890)<sup>595</sup>:

Meer as een kategismuspreek word daarom vandag verbloem, met die opsetlike verswyging van alle vrae, antwoorde of Sondagafdeling, om nie die kategismus-afkeer van sommige lidmate op te wek nie. Soos ’n koning wat onbekend wil reis, sy koninklike kentekens agterlaat, so moet die Kategismus ook soms van gedaante verander om aanstoot en aandag op homself te vermy<sup>596</sup> (890).<sup>597</sup>

This situation is precarious, Hanekom writes, because, in the history of Protestant churches, the neglect of the Catechism goes hand in hand with other unhealthy phenomena. It is a sign of regression and the cause of further decay (890). Despite the supposed indifference to the Catechism, then, prosperity and blessing were still regarded to be connected to it.

According to Lombard, there was a certain excuse doing the rounds and which was used to shy away from Catechism preaching. They would say: “Every sermon is a Catechism sermon.” (Lombard, 1958:79). But Lombard rejects this by exclaiming: “We know this is not really the case!” (79).

Despite the reported decline in Catechism preaching, the esteem for the Heidelberg did not abate. It is called “a jewel entrusted to us” that ought to be “rightly appreciated” (Editorial, 1952d: 870), and described as “die onwankelbare dinge”, “ou ankers van die geloof”, “die vaste koers”, “die grondslae van die Christelike geloof”, “’n samebindende krag” (870), “verfrissend en sprankelend”<sup>598</sup> (Lombard, 1958: 79) and something the Holy Spirit can particularly use “om die verstand te verlig, die wil te buig en die gemoed te

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<sup>594</sup> “cold recklessness”

<sup>595</sup> See also Van der Walt: “Genoeg, om aan te toon met watter juweel ons hier te doen het en waarom die vadere ons leraars voorskryf om minstens 12 keer per jaar (in gereelde volgorde) daarvoor te preek. Mag julle genade ontvang om dit getrou en op bevatlike wyse te doen (Joh. 21: 17b). En wat die hoorders betref, laat hulle ag gee op die vermaning van die Meester: ‘Pas dan op hoe julle hoor’ (Luk. 8: 18a), gretig, aandagtig, biddend in stede van die ore te laat hang by die aankondiging dat die predikasie oor Sondag soveel, vraag soveel van die Kategismus handel, en wel na die liggaam aanwesig is, maar in die gees oral omdool” (Van der Walt, 1952: 413).

<sup>596</sup> Today, more than one Catechism sermon are disguised, with the deliberate concealment of all questions, answers or Sunday section, stir up some members’ aversion to the Catechism. Like a king who wants to travel without being recognised, leaving behind his marks of royalty, the Catechism also has to change shape to prevent not giving offence and to prevent attention.

<sup>597</sup> J.J.R. again echoes the same sentiments: “Sommige skyn eens te bang om die Vraag en Antwoord te lees, al is die preek al min of meer volgens ’n Sondagsafdeling, omdat daar lidmate is wat niks van die droë kategismuspreek hou nie” (J.J.R., 1953 871).

<sup>598</sup> “old anchors of faith”, “the fixed direction”, “the fundamentals of the Christian faith”, “a unifying power” (870), “refreshing and ebullient”

stig...<sup>599</sup> (79). Furthermore, it is referred to as a “tried and tested book of our church” (Hanekom, 1950: 890), and a confession “that seizes the human heart, and penetrates to the core of his existence” (Heyns, 1955: 809). Regarding confessions in general, it is said to be a “teacher who time and again leads us to the Word of God as the only rule of our faith” and “one who is always on the guard to defend the high authority and sole jurisdiction of the Bible against everyone and everything” (Editorial, 1952e: 966).

Despite this praise-singing, though, there was a big apparent need and drive to gather renewed support and enthusiasm for the Catechism. Various reasons were cited in motivation of the need for more emphasis on the Catechism.

One of the complaints we have often heard throughout this study is on the foreground again in this period: the lack of knowledge of the Catechism. A commission for “kerkherstel en evangelisasie”<sup>600</sup> was established by the Free State Synod in 1953 for exactly this reason:

Ons stel egter onmiddellik die vraag: maar is dit nou waar dat daar by ons nog nie met goeie reg van kerkverval deur belydenis-verlating gespreek kan word nie? Laat ons ’n bietjie in alle eerlikheid die vraag stel: Hoeveel van ons lidmate *ken* hulle Kerk se uitgesproke belydenis in die Drie Formuliere van Enigheid, en hoeveel leef en handel in alle opsigte uit daardie kennis? Ja, ons kan selfs verder gaan en vra: Hoeveel van ons predikante *leef en preek* in alle opsigte ‘konfessie-bewus’ en ‘konfessie-getrou’? Hoeveel van ons regerende ouderlinge regeer en lei die kudde inderdaad met die herderstaf van die ‘konfessie’, gebonde aan die Woord van God? Dit is tog moontlik en ek meen dit is wat vandag aktueel is in ons NG Kerk! – dat die belydenis van ’n Kerk verlaat kan word, nie in openlike verwerping en bestryding nie, maar wel in verontagsaming en in onkunde ... ’n Beroep op die belydenis maak op baie, selfs op ons Sinodes, so goed as geen indruk nie, en dit is tog seker ’n bewys dat baie die belydenis verlaat het sonder om self daarvan bewus te wees<sup>601</sup> (Kock 1953: 903-904).

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<sup>599</sup> “to enlighten the mind, bend the will and form the mood”

<sup>600</sup> “church restoration and evangelism”

<sup>601</sup> However, we immediately ask the question: but is it true now that there cannot yet rightly be spoken about church decay through confession abandonment among us? Let us ask the question in all honesty: How many members know their Church’s declared confession in the Three Formulae of Unity, and how many live and act in all regards with that knowledge? Yes, we can go even further and ask: How many of our ministers live and preach in all regards ‘aware of the confession’ and ‘true to the confession’? How many of our elders rule and indeed lead the flock with the shepherd’s crook of the ‘confession’, bound to the Word of God? Surely, it is possible and I mean it is current in our Dutch Reformed Church today! – that the confession of a Church can be deserted, not through open rejection and contestation, but indeed

Both J.P. van der Walt (1952: 413) and Z.B. Loots (1957: 72) shared this sentiment. Van der Walt quotes Hosea 4:6 (“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ...”) and warns that this grievance is also true of the DRC (Van der Walt, 1952: 413). For Loots, there is “disturbing signs” of a “deplorable lack of knowledge of the teaching of the church” among congregants (Loots, 1957: 72).

Heyns holds that there has never before been a time when Catechism preaching was so vital. He states that there is a need that is “deeply radical” (“diep ingrypend”) and one that can only be satisfied with some sort of “moderate reformatory action”, that is, “more thorough and regular Catechism preaching” that would lead to an “inward reformation” (Heyns, 1955: 809). The DRC has become an “adopting church” instead of being a “confessing church”, warns Heyns (809).

This time sectarian groups are presented as a particularly prominent threat to which Catechism-preaching is the ideal countermeasure (Editorial, 1948b: 1156; J.J.R., 1953: 871; Editorial, 1952e: 966-967; Van der Walt, 1952: 413; Editorial, 1953i: 4). The inroads of sectarian groups were directly blamed on the lack of the confessions and the failure of ministers to preach on the Catechism as required (J.J.R., 1953: 871).

Another reason given for the need for renewed zeal for the Heidelberg is the “bond of unity” that it provides with the “sister churches” and the churches all over the world (Hanekom, 1950: 890). This strengthened unity on the basis of the Catechism is said to be a “strong weapon” against the “Roman threat” (890). In fact, Hanekom calls the Heidelberg Catechism the “most consistent anti-Roman book known” (890). It is further said to be a good “lodestar for the youth – away from the Roman Catholic heresy towards the freedom of Christ” (890).

The Catechism also continued to be connected to the purely Reformed faith in an all-encompassing way. One can almost say it stood for everything. An editorial in *Die Kerkbode* of 1958 is a good example of this rhetoric. It stated, after Prof. K. Dijk’s *Die dienst der prediking*, that systematic preaching of the salvific truths contained in the Catechism holds the following benefits:

Dit is vir die inleiding van die gemeente in die skatte van die waarheid van God, vir die waaragtige opbou van die geestelike lewe, vir die verdediging van

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through defiance and ignorance ... To many, even our Synods, appealing to the confession basically makes no impression and yet it is proof that many deserted the confession without even being aware of it.

die suiwer belydenis, vir die bestryding van die dwalinge, vir die versterking van die Gereformeerde besef, vir die persoonlike heilsbeleving van baie groot waarde ...<sup>602</sup> (Editorial, 1958f: 1109).

Finally, we also see instances in the period 1949 to 1963 where the Heidelberg Catechism is very strongly associated with the identity of the DRC and the Afrikaners.

For J.C. Lombard rejuvenation of Catechism preaching will impact positively on the character of the DRC (Lombard, 1958: 77-78). He holds that faithful Catechism preaching is a prophetic deed through which ministers can and should show that they are and want to be Dutch Reformed (78). Revival in Catechism preaching goes hand in hand with a renewed awareness of the DRC's unique character (78).

Two other examples of the identification between the Catechism and a specific group identity had more contemporary political overtones. The first is a letter by C.E.W. Gutsche concerning "catechesis and our race question" (Gutsche, 1957: 513). Although Gutsche himself did not directly relate this to the Catechism, we can argue that, given the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC's catechesis, his letter does address issues pertaining to the Catechism.

In his letter, he asked whether the DRC and its sister churches do not have a responsibility "to systematically and thoroughly educate future members about the churches' official stand on our race question" (513). He continues:

Ons Kerke het hulle tog duidelik teen integrasie van blank en nie-blank uitgespreek. Behoort die onderskeie Sinodes nie te bepaal dat daar *minstens twee of drie katekisasielesse* per jaar opsy gesit word om hierdie beleid duidelik uiteen te sit nie? ... [H]oe kan ons met reg verwag dat hy op later leeftyd ons Kerke se beleid gaan propageer as hy nie betyds weet wat dit is nie?<sup>603</sup> (513).<sup>604</sup>

<sup>602</sup> It is of great value for the introduction of the congregation to the treasures of God's truth, for the true development of the spiritual life, for the defence of the pure confession, for the contestation of the heresies, for the strengthening of the Reformed understanding, for the personal salvation experience ...

<sup>603</sup> Our Churches did in fact speak out against the integration of white and non-white. Should the various Synods not determine that at least two or three catechesis lessons per year be dedicated to explaining this policy? ... How can we rightly expect him to propagate our Churches' policy later in his life if he does not know in time what it is?

<sup>604</sup> David Bosch critically responded to this letter some time later: "Ek het sy brief met teleurstelling gelees. Ons katekisasielesse is bedoel om die voornemende lidmaat op hoogte te bring met die Skrifwaarhede en die leer van ons Kerk. Hoe u geagte korrespondent die 'rassebeleid van ons Kerk' onder een van genoemde hoofde wil behandel, is vir my nie duidelik nie" (Bosch 1957: 703).

However, one may also critically asked how Bosch's counter proposal was interpreted by the DRC: "Dit het lankal tyd geword dat ons deur middel van ons katekisasielasse, lidmate daarop sal wys wat dit beteken om Christene te wees in 'n land soos hierdie. Dit mag dalk gebeur dat, wanneer ons ons sendingroeping gehoorsaam, baie 'rassevraagstukke' hulself sal oplos" (703).



The second example features the meaning of the Heidelberg Catechism for sexual relations between black and white people. *Die Kerkbode* calls this “’n sonde wat die skandvlek van die nasies is” and “’n euwel wat die teerste van lewensverhoudinge besoedel”<sup>605</sup> (Editorial, 1959f: 964). In denouncing this behaviour, the Catechism’s discussion of the seventh commandment is cited (questions and answers 108 and 109). “This exposition of the Lord’s commandment is straightforward language”, *Die Kerkbode* states, and then warns:

Hier staan ons voor ’n sonde wat sy giftige asem oor maatskappy en volk uitblaas. Die ondergang van die Romeinse Ryk, met sy sedeloosheid en sy minagting van die heiligheid van die huwelik, moet vir ons volk ’n waarskuwing wees<sup>606</sup> (1959: 964).

## 5.6. 1963: the fourth centenary of the Heidelberg Catechism

In comparison to the commemorations listed and discussed earlier, the 400-year commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1963 can perhaps be described as a non-event. (Although our focus is not on the Belgic Confession, the same could be said for its anniversary in 1961.)

These commemorations made it to the agenda of the Council of the Churches in an almost casual way. The General Synodical Commission of the DRC in the Orange Free State decided to lay it before the meeting of the Council of the Churches of 1961 that the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism be commemorated in a festive way (Barnard, 1960: 575). The decision, as published in the agenda, is to the point, and gives no motivation for such commemorations. It reads as follows:

- A) To publish appropriate articles in the church papers, namely *Die Kerkbode*, *Die Voorligter*, *N.G. Teologiese Tydskrif* and others.
- B) To draw the attention of sympathetic Christian Associations to this fact.
- C) To pay appropriate attention to it on the occasion of Reformation Day in 1961 and 1963.
- D) To put it under the attention of Churchly Radio programmes.

<sup>605</sup> “a sin which is the shame of the nations” and “an evil which pollutes the most tender relationships in life”

<sup>606</sup> Here we stand before a sin that exhales its toxic breath over society and nation. The demise of the Roman Empire, with its licentiousness and its contempt for the sacredness of marriage, should be a warning to our nation.

E) To use all other ways to bring the specific confessional document, together with the canons of Dordt, to the attention of the church public (Agenda Raad van die Kerke 27ste vergadering, 1961:15).

The *N.G. Teologiese Tydskrif* (NGTT), however, published no such articles in 1963. Only a review of the book by Th. L. Haitjema, *De Heidelbergse Catechismus als klankbodem en inhoud van het actuele belijden onzer kerk*, was published. It is called a “beautifully edited book” with “rich content” through which the “everlasting youth of Heidelberg” is “poignantly” brought to the readers’ attention (Verhoef, 1963: iii).

*Die Kerkbode* of 1963 published articles on the Heidelberg Catechism throughout the year, but there is never any mention of an official celebration. From the decision of the Council of the Churches, it is clear that no large and coordinated celebratory events were considered. However, some reports of circuit meetings in *Die Kerkbode* mention celebrations or conferences organised in celebration of the anniversary<sup>607</sup> on congregational level.

Moreover, the first article published in *Die Kerkbode* on the commemoration, in January 1963, points out a lack of interest in the Catechism. D.D. Rosslee begins by stating that “blote feestelike jubilering die Heidelbergse Kategismus nie tot nuwe lewe sal wek nie”<sup>608</sup> (Rosslee, 1963a: 146). Nevertheless, he continues, it may lead to new interest which again may inspire new life (146).

Rosslee then proceeds, not to discuss the church’s role in the commemoration, but, as reflected in the title of his article (“Heidelbergse Kategismus 400 jaar – owerheidsjubileum?”), the possibility of government taking responsibility for it. He concedes that a government should not interfere with “ecclesial confessional differences” but nevertheless argues that the government is free to favour and benefit some confessions on the basis of their historically important role:

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<sup>607</sup> See for example KB 1963: 791: “Ring Boshof (Dealesville 17 April 1963 evd) - Besluit dat Kerkrade ter herdenking van die 400-jarige bestaan van die HK spesiale aandag aan betekenis en inhoud van hierdie belangrike en gedenkwaardige leerboek sal skenk en gemeente daaromtrent sal voorlig”; “Ring Lindley (Reitz-Wes 25-28 April 1963) - Agv feesviering rondom Heidelbergse Kategismus word besluit om belangrikheid van Gesangeboek met die ‘Drie Formuliere van Enigheid’ te onderstreep, genoemde Formulering aan belydeniskatgisante te skenk en na-kategese by KJV. waar te neem”; KB 1963: 477 “Ring Swellendam - Konferensie met gemeente: Prof FJM Potgieter oor 400-jarige bestaan van die Heidelbergse Kategismus.”

<sup>608</sup> “simply celebrating festivities will not rejuvenate the Heidelberg Catechism”

... dit [staan] die owerheid tog seker vry om dié konfessies te begunstig en te bevoordeel wat medeverantwoordelik was vir die vorming van die wesensaard van die volk tot eer van God. Dit is onteenseglik waar dat daar geen groter enkele faktor méér verantwoordelik was vir die stukragtige Calvinistiese karakter van ons volk as juis die suiwere belydenisrigting van die drie Hollands-Afrikaanse kerke in die land nie. Die Heidelbergse Kategismus verdien hier primêre vermelding as die mees bekende en mees gebruikte belydenisskrif in katkisasie en kategismusprediking<sup>609</sup> (146).

If that is not enough to move the government to partake in the commemoration of the Catechism, Rosslee proceeds by pointing out the role that a government played in the making of the Heidelberger. The initiative of Frederick III is said to be “all too familiar” (146). Frederick III courageously defended the Catechism when it became necessary (147), Rosslee states, and then emphasises this point: “Ons herhaal – hy het die *Reformasie* met *moed* verdedig!”<sup>610</sup> (147). Rosslee remembers this bold act of Frederick III as taking place at a critical time:

Die Christelike godsdiens was verwaarloos en verkeerdelik onderrig sonder vaste reël en na elkeen se goeë dunke. Met so ’n onheilige toedrag van sake kan dit nòg in kerk nòg in burgerstaat nòg in die huisgesin goed gesteld wees (147).

These “evils” (147) were defied by Frederick’s instruction that the Heidelberg Catechism be drawn up.

In the face of this “gilded historical and reformational framework”, Rosslee reflects on his own time. For him, it is a time in which the teaching of the Catechism is no longer the same. It no longer has any place in schools, and therefore “[d]ogmatic indoctrination, according to [a] particular Calvinistic Christian style is inevitable” (147). In order to achieve this, he suggests that all Christian authorities be involved: “alle Christelike owerheidspersone [moet] tog help reformeer om op ’n bepaalde belydenisstandpunt te staan soos Frederik III” (147). For Rosslee, the problem that Frederick III faced is exactly the same problem that they face. He sees a widespread “*beginselonkunde*” (147). The Christian principled life or worldview should take its rightful place (147), and for Rosslee

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<sup>609</sup> ... the authorities are free to sponsor and give preferential treatment to those confessions that are co-responsible in the forming of the nation’s nature to the glory of God. It is indisputably true that no other larger single factor is more responsible for the driven Calvinist character of our nation than precisely the pure direction of confession of the three Dutch-Afrikaans churches in the country. The Heidelberg Catechism deserves particular mention here as the most well known and most utilised confession in catechesis and Catechism preaching.

<sup>610</sup> “We repeat – he bravely defended the Reformation!”

a decent commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism can achieve that.

The role of a specific historical narrative as a subtext to Rosslee's argument should not be overlooked. He holds to the opinion that the state should not interfere with confessional matters, but sees the South African situation as an exception because of the historical role of a certain confessional basis in the shaping of the *volk*. If the state cherishes and cares about this *volk*, Rosslee seems to imply, it should favour and promote the religious traditions that shaped them.

The ideal, for Rosslee, is for the church and the state to have "healthy contact and cooperation" through a joint celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Catechism (147). State authorities' commitment to the Reformation and the Formulae is a matter of importance for Rosslee:

En mag ons volhardend bid dat ons Christelike owerheidspersone, vir wie ons oneindig dankbaar is, toenemend geïnspireer sal word tot diepere godsvrug, absolute trou teenoor Skrif en belydenis en moed en durf t.o.v. prinsipies van die Hervorming, met name in opvoeding en onderwys<sup>611</sup> (147).

This celebration that Rosslee hoped for never took place. Nevertheless, various other articles in *Die Kerkbode* of 1963 reflected on the Heidelberg Catechism in the light of its 400th anniversary. We now turn to these discussions and its main themes.

### 5.6.1. *The dreariness of Catechism preaching*

Rosslee's opening words, together with various other articles in 1963, create the impression that the Catechism, and specifically preaching on it, was rather unpopular and regarded as dull. In May 1963, *Die Kerkbode* admits to this dullness and tries to rectify it. In some church circles, it states, the impression is created that the Catechism is not popular, and others pretend that Catechism preaching has never been very popular (Editorial, 1963a: 596). It is "typified as dry, dogmatic, without any grip on the heart (*gemoed*)" (596). It also does not appeal to people practically in their 20<sup>th</sup>-century circumstances (596). But this, *Die Kerkbode* contends, can be true of any sermon and Catechism preaching should not be singled out on this point (596). Rather, renewed interest in the Catechism will convince people of its "lovely possibilities" (597). Therefore,

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<sup>611</sup> And may we pray assiduously that our Christian persons of authority, for whom we are eternally grateful, will be increasingly inspired to deeper godliness, absolute fidelity to the Scriptures and confessions and valour and courage regarding principles of the Reformation, specifically in education and instruction.

the author calls for the Catechism to be given its rightful place: “Laat die Kategismuspreek weer tot sy reg kom!”<sup>612</sup> (597).

The allegations of dreariness were indeed widespread. In February 1963, Catechism preaching is again defended against accusations of being dry (KB, 1963: 176). The author acknowledges that a “variation in diet” (176) is always welcome and that a Catechism sermon every Sunday is not very exciting (176). Nevertheless, he distinguishes between the dreariness that characterises Catechism preaching and the truths of the Catechism. The latter, he asserts, cannot be said to be dry, but rather thirst-quenching (176).

A.J.B. Rawlins, too, remarks on the unpopularity of Catechism preaching. He calls for a change of attitude:

Dit is tyd dat die vele onnodige sugte en suur gesigte ten opsigte van Kategismusprediking plek moet maak vir die werking van Gods Gees – daar in die banke by *al* die gemeentede en ook op die kansel – sodat daar biddend en met oorgawe geluister kan word na die Woord van God en die leer van ons kerk; dan sal daar nie soveel afvalliges en traes van hart wees nie. Die gemeente behoort opgewonde te raak en dankbaar te wees vir die Kategismusprediking<sup>613</sup> (Rawlins, 1963: 707).

In his comprehensive discussion of the Catechism, J.A. Heyns (1963: 598-602) also touches on the view that the Catechism is dry: “Die Kategismus wil nie ‘n dor-droë leer aanbied nie - en as dít inderdaad ons indruk daarvan is, is dít as gevolg van die verworping in die hand van ‘n onbekwame prediker en kategeet”<sup>614</sup> (600).

These examples, even though they aim to counter the tendency, give the impression that the Catechism was not a document that created much enthusiasm in the DRC. However, it is argued that this view of the Catechism results from the fact that its true nature is overlooked and misrepresented.

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<sup>612</sup> “Let the Catechism come into its own again!”

<sup>613</sup> It is time that many unnecessary sighs and sour faces relating to Catechism preaching make way for the work of God’s spirit – there in the pews in all the congregants and also in the pulpit – so that we can listen to the Word of God and the teachings of our church in worship and with enthusiasm. The congregation should be enthusiastic and grateful for the Catechism preaching.

<sup>614</sup> “The Catechism does not want to present an arid-dry doctrine – and if that is in fact our impression of it, it is the result of decadence in the hands of an incompetent preacher and catechist.”

### 5.6.2. *The unceasing love for the Catechism*

Nevertheless, when writing on the Catechism in the face of its 400th anniversary, it is done in the same nostalgic and endearing tone that is associated with it throughout the period covered in this study. It is called “the well-known and beloved Heidelberg Catechism” (Editorial, 1963a: 596), the “pragtige Heidelbergse Kategismus”<sup>615</sup> (596), a “treasured heritage” (Theron, 1963: 414), a “book of comfort” (414) and something that can “captivate, charm and inspire” its readers (Editorial, 1963a: 596). It is, moreover, said to be inherently youthful (Heyns, 1963: 600) and also a “memoir of the wrestling church, a praiseworthy witness of the triumphant faith in the heart of the struggling church” (600).

These sentiments serve to contradict the idea that the Catechism is dull and dry, but points to its “true nature”.

### 5.6.3. *The need for the Catechism today*

There is also much reason to think that Catechism preaching was often not observed as regularly as was officially required. Numerous reports of circuit meetings published in *Die Kerkbode* include admonishments for more regular preaching of the Catechism, or statements asserting the importance of Catechism preaching (*Die Kerkbode*, 90: 103, 381, 722, 724, 757, 818, 820; *Die Kerkbode*, 92: 478, 479, 646, 649, 756-757, 887).

There also seems to have been some critique of or confusion about whether Catechism preaching could be said to be in agreement with the central Reformed principle of the preaching of the Word. Various articles addressed this issue and affirmed that Catechism preaching is indeed legitimate proclamation of God’s Word (Heyns, 1963: 601; T.P., 1963: 790; Editorial, 1958f: 1109; Rawlins, 1963: 707).

Despite these issues, the DRC was as confident as always that regular Catechism preaching would be an antidote to many contemporary ills. A wide variety of reasons were given as motivation for a renewed emphasis on the Catechism. Rawlins writes that the Catechism should be “spoon fed” to congregants “for the maintenance of the congregation of Christ, the unity of the church, the preservation of the purity of the church’s teaching, and because of the need for self-defence” (Rawlins, 1963: 707). Continuous reflection on the Heidelberg Catechism together with the Belgic Confession

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<sup>615</sup> “the beautiful Heidelberg Catechism”

and the Canon of Dordt will bring the church “on the right track”, he writes (707).

This suggests a specific understanding of the time in which the church found itself. It was thought of as a demanding time in which there was a “struggle of the faith” and the need to “shield [oneself] against heresy” (Editorial, 1963b: 176). The “modern life” was said to be strenuous and therefore the “thorough equipping of congregants” was a prerequisite (176). Elsewhere, it is said that Catechism preaching is “sorely needed” (Editorial, 1963a: 596) so that congregants can achieve the “right insight in what they confess” and guard against the “spirit of indifference” (596). The congregation had to be brought before “the gravity of its own Confessions” (596).

De Villiers (1963: 606-608), like many other authors, gives the impression that he longs for a golden age of the Catechism to return and for the Catechism to regain a position it has lost:

Ons sou graag wou sien dat daar as vrug van ons herdenking ’n mooi Afrikaanse verwerking van die Kategismus sal verskyn. Verder het ons die begeerte dat dit weer opnuut gebruik sal word as kerkboek en leerboek. As daar 400 jaar gelede ’n behoefte bestaan het aan ’n leerboek, dan is daar ongetwyfeld vandag ook nog ’n groot behoefte aan die gebruik van die Kategismus vir toerusting van die lidmate. Die Heidelberger het bewys gelewer dat dit die toets van die tyd kan deurstaan<sup>616</sup> (De Villiers, 1963: 608).

Heyns concedes that the Catechism - because it was a “child of its time” - says nothing about contemporary issues like “the place of Israel”, “ecumenism”, “modern world views like Communism”, or the “relationship between Christianity and other world religions” (Heyns, 1963: 600). Nevertheless, he asserts that “meticulous and dedicated Catechism-preaching and teaching is the most eminent medium through which the church can answer to the Reformation ideal more and more, and with that, to its New Testament form as given by Christ” (602).

What should be noted about these examples is the fact that they do not actually interpret the Catechism in the face of any of the issues mentioned. The answers that the Catechism supposedly provides are not expounded on. But we can sense some notion of urgency in the face of an unarticulated crisis. Heyns comes closest to actually naming examples of

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<sup>616</sup> We would have liked to see that a beautiful Afrikaans rendition of the Catechism appear as fruit of our commemoration. Furthermore, we have the desire that it will be used anew as church book and textbook. If a desire for a textbook existed 400 years ago, then there is undoubtedly still a great desire for the use of the Catechism for equipping congregants. The Heidelberg proved that it can stand the test of time.



what the confusion was about: ecumenism, Communism and the relationship between Christianity and other world religions, and the place of Israel. Although he holds that the Catechism does not address any of these issues directly, he suggests that the Catechism serves as a source of direction.

#### 5.6.4. *Catechism and volk*

There is one thing that is clearly associated with the Catechism: the life of the *volk*. In his enthusiasm to make the point of the close connection between the Catechism and the DRC, J.A. Heyns miscalculates and exclaims: “the Catechism is practically just as old as our church on Afrikaans soil!” (Heyns, 1963: 598). Similarly, D.W. de Villiers emphasised that the Heidelberg Catechism has been the textbook of the DRC for the whole three hundred years of its existence (De Villiers, 1963: 606): “We can actually say that it has been textbook and life book number one for the DRC” (606).

De Villiers then continues to show that every period of the DRC’s history was permeated by the Catechism. He particularly underscores its faithful adherence to the Church Order of Dordt (De Villiers, 1963: 607-608).

These examples also resonate with the article of D.D. Rosslee referred to earlier. For Rosslee, the correlation between the Catechism and the *volk* is so strong that he wants the government to take charge of the Catechism commemorations. In 1963, we can therefore argue, the Catechism is remembered as directly shaping the identity of the DRC *and* the Afrikaners.

### 5.7. The essence of identity: the 1962 unification of the DRC

So far, in this chapter, we have discussed a variety of the DRC’s identity-shaping practices. On the one hand, we have seen how an emphasis on history and remembering (5.2. and 5.3.) turned into widespread and highly emotional commemoration-events specifically related to the DRC and the Afrikaners (5.4.) and particularly how these two identities were conflated in these ceremonies. A sense of pride and achievement characterised these events. We have also seen how the insistence on foregrounding the religious aspects of these commemorations served as a way to mitigate its provocation of nationalism. On the other hand, however, we have seen the non-event of the 400th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism (5.6.).

In this final section, the focus is on the 1962 unification of the white Dutch Reformed churches. At the time, there were separate Dutch Reformed churches for different races – the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). We will look into the DRC's understanding of itself and also its understanding of unity.

The background of the DRC's unification process, as the reader may recall, is the infamous 1862 Loedolff case (see 2.1.1.). Based on Ordinance no. 7 of 1843, it was ruled that churches outside the Cape Colony could not be part of the DRC in the Cape. Accordingly, independent churches developed in the Free State, Natal, Transvaal and later also South West Africa. Although various attempts have been made to unify the regional synods into one general synod since 1907, this was only achieved in 1962.

In line with the numerous commemorations at the time, 1957 was commemorated as half a century of the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches during the bi-annual meeting of the Council of the Churches. Moreover, a big fuss was made about the fact that the unification took place exactly one hundred years after the separation of 1862. This breakthrough after 100 years of separation was discussed and celebrated with a sense of euphoria (Du Toit, 1962: 458-462; Albertyn, 1962: 469; Editorial, 1962a: 488).

What were the factors that led to the success of this attempt of unification?

### *5.7.1. Tilling the soil for unification*

Although the issue of unification had consistently been on the agenda of the Council of the Churches, it was pushed to the background after 1947 when a draft regulation served before the Council of the Churches (Rex, 1957a: 827). However, the required consensus could not be reached, and the proposal was rejected. One of the big concerns was the way in which congregations would be represented in a general synod. For practical reasons, not all congregations would have direct representation on the general synod, which was not a very likable idea. As C.R. Kotzé wrote in 1948, “met ons presbiteriale regeringstelsel en ons volkstradisie wil die Boerenasie in die hoogste vergadering verteenwoordiging hê”<sup>617 618</sup> (Kotzé, 1948b: 1024).

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<sup>617</sup> “with our Presbyterian system of rule and our national tradition, the Boer nation wants representation in the highest meetings”

<sup>618</sup> In agreement with this sentiment, the DRC's character is often described as deeply democratic. See Potgieter 1955: 158; Albertyn 1955: 521; Albertyn 1956a: 1005; Albertyn 1959: 819.

However, from the mid 1950s, a very positive attitude towards unification was present. This was stimulated by the appointment of a special commission in 1955 to investigate the matter and advise the Council on ways to proceed with the unification process<sup>619</sup> (Rex, 1957a: 827).

This positive attitude was expressed in reports about widespread unity among people. In 1955, J.D. Cilliers writes that if a referendum among congregants were to be held on the issue, the outcome, in his estimation, would be a definite “yes” (Cilliers, 1955: 313). The ordinary congregants, he claims, have a much stronger “samehorigheidsdrang”<sup>620</sup> than is generally presumed (313). Albertyn, too, holds that there is a “deep, underlying awareness of [the church’s] unity” among the “churchly public, the *volk*, and the government” that spills over into “an urge for complete unification towards visible unity as symbol of the internal unity that is so strong” (Albertyn 1959: 819).<sup>621</sup>

Despite the fact that the partitioning is seen as something that was forced upon the church and as something that was “unnatural” (Albertyn, 1962: 469), it is nevertheless remembered as something allowed by God for reasons out of the DRC’s control (Cilliers, 1955: 314). In agreement with this interpretation, care is taken not to see the establishment of independent churches as a curse (Cilliers, 1955: 314; Editorial, 1962a: 488), but rather to celebrate the diversity it brought about (Editorial, 1962a: 488).

The first attempts to work towards unification marked by the establishment of the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches in 1907 are tied to the history of the entire *volk* and its fate. During the fiftieth anniversary of the Council of the Churches in 1957, the chairperson noted that the Council was born “uit die smartlikste tydperk van ons volk se

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<sup>619</sup> Comparing P.J. Viljoen’s article (1954: 923) (“Ons kerkverband. Waarheen gaan ons Ned. Geref. Kerke”) to the general trend of articles from 1955 onwards, it is clear how fast momentum for the idea of unification was gathered.

<sup>620</sup> “urge for togetherness”

<sup>621</sup> We can point to specific memories of the period of separation that underlie the drive to unify. It is remembered as something that was forced upon the churches and not something that “our congregants” or “our ministers and church councils” desired (Cilliers, 1955: 314; See also Rex, 1957a: 823; Editorial, 1960a: 36). Albertyn calls it an “unnatural” separation (Albertyn, 1962: 469). In defiance of this enforcement, however, the divided past is remembered as one in which the unity of the federated churches had always been assumed and recognised (Editorial, 1957a: 628; Editorial, 1957c: 628; Editorial, 1962a: 488). Cilliers claims that there is an “eeu-oue eenheidsdrang” and holds that if the Council of the Churches succeeds in establishing a general synod, it would simply be “die offisiële stempel ... van ’n eeu-oue voldwonge feit” (Cilliers, 313; see also Editorial, 1962b: 596). Albertyn rejoices in the “dieperliggende eenheidsbesef – ons eie ‘unio mystica’ – wat nog altyd daarvoor sorg gedra het dat in die oog van sy eie lidmate, van die publiek en die staat, die NG Kerk as ’n ondeelbare eenheid beskou was” (Albertyn, 1962: 470).

geskiedenis”<sup>622</sup> (Rex, 1957a: 822). It was in 1903, shortly after the Anglo-Boer War, that the idea of unification was first raised, he says. The Afrikaner had been “scattered, despondent, impoverished, humiliated, and robbed of their beloved freedom but not yet estranged from their religion and church” (822-823). The Reformed Confession is said to have been the only thing left to bind them together and the only hope for the *volk* “to rise again from the ashes of destruction” (823). This is what led the Afrikaners from a scattered *volk* to a united nation – bound together as a unity against undermining hostile powers (823).

Despite the emphasis that it is the Reformed Confession that kept the *volk* standing, the emphasis seems to fall more on the *volk* than on its Confession. The Confession is depicted as serving the needs of the *volk*. Moreover, just as the partitioning of 1862 was caused by outside forces, it is now, too, for Cilliers, the “world out there together with our domestic problems that force us to take each other’s hands and to form a tighter unity” (Cilliers, 314). Even more compellingly, he sketches the unification of the federated DRC as a reality prepared and destined by God. It is the “calling of our generation”, “the will of God”,<sup>623</sup> and a task that faces no “insurmountable problems” as it is a unity “that already lives in the hearts of our congregants” (314). It is a calling for which the DRC is said to be well prepared:

Het ons dan nie reeds één gelykluidende belydenis nie, één eenselwige kerkorganisasie, één liturgiek, één beleid, één heilige roeping teenoor donker Afrika nie? Selfs ons wette en bepalinge word reeds voortdurend gelykluidend geskawe en geknie – een onmiskenbare wil en drang om een te wees<sup>624</sup> (314).<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> “from the most grievous period in our nation’s history”

<sup>623</sup> In 1957, too, it is said that the time for unification is determined by God: “[D]ie Here ken Sy tyd en weet wat vir ons Kerk die beste is. In Sy hand wat alles bestuur, is ook die ‘wanneer’ veilig” (Editorial, 1957c: 628). See also Albertyn 1962: 470.

<sup>624</sup> Do we not then have one concordant confession, one reclusive church organisation, one liturgy, one policy, one holy calling toward dark Africa? Even our laws and stipulations are already constantly formed and shaped concordantly – one undeniable will and urge to be one.

<sup>625</sup> Albertyn (1955: 521) follows the same logic, emphasising the unity of confession, spirit and vision: “Maar intussen het dit gewis hoog tyd geword dat ’n landswyse, georganiseerde en volgehoue poging in belang van organiese kerkvereniging aangewend word. Die gees van die tyd oor die ganse Christelike wêreld staan in die teken van nouer toehaling van die bande wat alle Christene aanmekaar snoer. Hoeveel te meer ons vier Gefedereerde NG Kerke wat reeds in belydenis, gees en uitsig een is! Die ganse Afrikaanse volk het deur sy opsienbare trek na die stede magtige nuwe probleme vir Gods Kerk laat ontstaan wat luid om die skepping van ’n verenigde front van Kerkweë roep. Daar is gewis duisende Christene wat nou wag op die Raad van die Kerke en op ons respektiewe Sinodes om die veldtog in belang van kerkvereniging te loods” (521).

J.R. Albertyn also sketched unification as an urgent calling of the church. He argues that it is “[g]ewigtige landsomstandighede”<sup>626</sup> that puts unification so high on the DRC’s agenda (Albertyn, 1956a: 1004). He wrote a two-part article in *Die Kerkbode* in which he discussed the urgency of unification (Albertyn, 1956a: 1004-105; 1956b: 1136ff.). He gives six reasons why unification should take place as soon as possible. In all these points, a sense of crisis is present. For Albertyn, the DRC needs to unite in order to be able to protect itself against onslaught and efficiently respond to threats and challenges.

In short, Albertyn’s six points reflect [1] the need for a “united front” in the face of the thousands of Bantus who have invaded “white cities” (1004)<sup>627</sup>; [2] the experience of urbanisation as a disruptive event for Afrikaners, and the need for the church to provide a “new orientation”, “expert scientific guidance” and speak with a “unified, authoritative voice” (1005); [3] a trust in “efficiency” as a means to solve problems and the belief that a unified church will improve efficiency (1005); [4] a hunger for more autonomy (1005)<sup>628</sup>; [5] the view that modern life is fast and that the church needs to adapt if it wants to keep up and stay relevant (1956b: 1140)<sup>629</sup>; and [6] the conviction that there is a “modern urge for closer cooperation” characteristic of the “entire Christian world” because of the need for the “joining of powers in the face of the common enemy” (1140).<sup>630</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> “grave national circumstances”

<sup>627</sup> The Tomlinson Report of 1955 is cited as proof of the fact that the church needs to form a “united front”: “Die verskyning van die Tomlinson-verslag oor rasse-aangeleenthede het die salige droom van gerustheid en veiligheid waarin die blanke ras verval het wreed verskeur, en die naakte werklikheid van toekomstige gevaar die land helder voor oë gestel” (Albertyn, 1956a: 1004).

<sup>628</sup> Albertyn’s argument on this point, however, is not that well thought through or consistent. One of the big issues standing in the way of unification was the emphasis on autonomy among the different DRC churches. Albertyn again states that the church “is jealous of its democratic character and the principle that each congregation is represented on the synod” (Albertyn, 1956a: 1005) and underscores the limits of excessive autonomy for the well-being of the Afrikaner as a *volk*. Too many independent and autonomous churches, he argues, increases the possibility of disintegration and division (Albertyn, 1957b: 1136). Separate and autonomous churches united by a common confession alone, he argues, are not sufficient. It will not prevent “fertile seeds for future schism” to be sown (1136). In an editorial in *Die Kerkbode* of 1960, a similar point is raised. It is said that the DRC “knows the misfortunes locked up in the policy of provincial isolation all too well” (Editorial, 1960a: 36), and gratitude is expressed for the fact that the “forced separation did not lead to schism” thanks to the “one confession” and “one policy” (36). Moreover, the principle that congregants separated by political and geographical borders could not belong to one church is depicted as an absurdity (36).

<sup>629</sup> See also Albertyn 1962: 471.

<sup>630</sup> In 1959, Albertyn makes the very same argument, this time describing the five Federated Dutch Reformed Churches as “the five fingers of a hand which together have to make a clenched fist against the common enemies of God’s Church on earth” (Albertyn, 1959: 819). Interestingly, he depicts the DRC as “rigid, unbending and conservative” with the tendency to “contest all attempts at change” and presents this as one of the internal threats it faces (1956b: 1140). It is prone to “too much boundness” and “reluctance to follow the legally free [*wettige-vrye*] way with faith and courage” (1140). For Albertyn, such faith and courage are needed even if they may sometimes “follow a foreign path” (1140). If the DRC can be

Unification as a response to a calling shows a shift in the DRC's mentality. Whereas unity was earlier depicted as faithfulness to the past and a resistance to the changing world, it is now also pertinently future-orientated. The motivation of unity is in the need for a new orientation, adaptation, and catching up with the modern world and the answers it provides for various problems. Unity was also sketched as "willed by God", "a calling of our generation", and something natural.

Theological reasoning for unity is conspicuously absent from these arguments. It is predominantly based on a specific reading of contemporary phenomena from an Afrikaner point of view.<sup>631</sup>

### *5.7.2. 1962 and the establishment of a general Synod*

The 1962 unification was experienced with much the same sentiment as the run-up to it. Now the long-endured symbolic unity was a visible reality. In the aftermath of the historic 1962 synodical meeting, *Die Kerkbode* reported as follows:

Weliswaar, ons was altyd één kerk. Die besoeker uit een provinsie in 'n ander het steeds, wanneer hy 'n NG Kerk binnestap, geweet en gevoel: dis my kerk hierdie; dis dieselfde kerk. Hy ken die taal wat daar gepraat word, die lied wat daar gesing word en die atmosfeer wat daar heers ... Steeds is daar gevoel dat ons nie maar net mekaar oor en weer wil raadpleeg nie, maar dat ons inderdaad uit een mond wil spreek en dat ons ons innerlike eenheid van siel ook wil bevestig in 'n eenheid van sinodale verband.

In openhartigheid het afgevaardigdes hul bedenkinge op bepaalde punte geopper en hul aanvoeling van gevare gelug. By alles was die oorweging wat deurslag gegee het, egter dit: ons is één; ons behoort bymekaar; ons glo in mekaar se goeie trou; ons staan bymekaar!<sup>632</sup> (Editorial, 1962b: 564).

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united, Albertyn holds, this will no longer be the case. The general synod will be able to state: "Dit is die weg, wandel daarop!" (1140).

<sup>631</sup> Du Toit echoes a similar point when he writes: "As ons ná 'n eeu terugkyk, val dit 'n mens op dat baie van hierdie tekortkominge deur die genade van die Here oorwin is. 'n Kerk wat gewillig is om te reformeer het altyd 'n toekoms. Maar dan moet met die oog op die probleme van ons tyd die foute van die verlede raakgesien en die geeste beproef word" (Du Toit, 1962: 462).

<sup>632</sup> Truly, we were always one church. The visitor from one province in another still knew and felt, when he stepped inside a Dutch Reformed Church: this is my church, this is the same church. He knows the language spoken there, the song sung there and the atmosphere that dominates ... Still the feeling exists that we do not simply want to consult each other back and forth, but they we indeed want to speak with one voice and that we also want to confirm our inner unity of spirit in a unity of synodic context. With frankness, delegates raised their reservations on given points and raised their anticipation of dangers. In everything, the consideration that was the decisive factor was: we are one; we believe in each other's good faith; we stand together!

The same euphoria characteristic of the commemoration events discussed in 5.4. is also present here. It is said that when the unification was officially confirmed, it was met by a “genial” and “heart-rending” psalm (“Prys die Heer met blye galme”). It is said to have been a “majestic experience” and the “fulfilment of a dream of the forebears”,<sup>633</sup> i.e. a moment filled with “nostalgia” when the dream they cherished and had carried with them became a reality (Editorial, 1962b: 564).

The “men” who did not give up on this dream are praised for their heroic deeds, sacrifices and persistent toiling. Above all, however, the unification is seen as willed by God and a gift to the church:

Dit pas dan ook by ’n geleentheid soos hierdie om hulde te bring aan die manne wat nie berus het in die sinodale versplintering van die afgelope eeu nie. Hulde aan hulle wat gedurende die vorige eeu deur besoeke en optrede in die ander provinsies die feit van ons eenheid bevestig het. Hulde aan hulle wat die eenheid van die kerkverband bevorder het deur die stigting van die Raad van die Kerke en deur hul volhardende arbeid ter bevordering van hereniging in een sinodale verband. Hulde aan hulle wat die voorbereidende stappe geneem het ... Maar bo alles, dank aan die Here wat ons deur al hierdie arbeid, strewe en besluite heen gelei het tot waar ons vandag staan. Dit is inderdaad van die Here en dit is wonderlik in ons oë!<sup>634</sup> (564).

The unification is also again connected to the DRC’s calling. In the official message of the synod communicated to all congregations, the hope is expressed that “the Lord will use us as a way to ensure the proclamation of the pure Biblical way of salvation”, that “closer contact with and more knowledge of each other will strengthen mutual love and appreciation”,<sup>635</sup> that we will jointly “witness to the Lord with new strength and clarity for the well-being of *volk* and *vaderland*”, and that “it will become possible to organise the work of the church to the outside [world] with more efficiency and strength in many

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<sup>633</sup> See also Albertyn 1962: 470: “Die terugkeer tot die nouste, organiese eenheid was gewis ook die hartewens van die vadere – ’n ideaal wat hulle vir honderd jaar volhardend nagestreef het en waartoe, na vorige teleurstellings, ons nou weer deur God die geleentheid gegun word.”

<sup>634</sup> It is also suitable at an event like this to pay tribute to the men who did not accept the synodical fragmentation of the past century. Tribute to them who confirmed the fact of our unity by means of visits and actions in other provinces. Tribute to them who enhanced the unity of the church context by means of the founding of the Council for the Churches and their persevering labour to enhance the reunification in synodical context. Tribute to those who took the preparatory steps ... But above all, thanks to the Lord who guided us through all this labour, striving and decisions to where we are today. It is indeed from the Lord and it is wonderful in our eyes!

<sup>635</sup> This is furthermore qualified as a disposition that greatly pleases the Lord (Editorial, 1962c: 596).



terrains” (Editorial, 1962c: 596).<sup>636</sup> The wish is also expressed that the “predominant characteristic of our church may be that we are indeed the church of Christ and of our *volk*”, and that this will lead to “a pure witness towards other churches”, and “fruitful cooperation with other churches for the well-being of all population groups” (Editorial 1962b: 564).

Moreover, the survival of the Afrikaner is said to be a core aspect of the church’s calling. It is not only the church that was under attack, but the Afrikaners themselves:

Nie slegs die kerk van Christus nie, maar die hele Afrikaanse volk se voortbestaan word bedreig. Dit het seker nog nooit in die geskiedenis van die wêreld gebeur dat soveel nasies met soveel woede hulle teen een enkele volk gekant het nie. Die kerk durf nie sy oë sluit vir die benoudheid waarin die volk verkeer nie. Sonder om op die terrein van die staat te tree, vermaan ons die gelowiges om waaksaam, sterk en standvastig te wees, gereed vir enige opofferings wat die Here van ons mag eis<sup>637</sup> (Editorial, 1962c: 596).

### 5.7.3. *Unity and diversity?*

The strong arguments in favour of unification cited above did not fit all that well with the DRC’s stance on unity and diversity expressed in other contexts. Read in conjunction with the general stance on unity and diversity, it is clear that the DRC invented a unique rationale to drive the process of unification – indeed a case of special pleading.

A prominent theme within the bigger discourse on unity and diversity is the question of how the vast diversity of churches ought to be understood. In 1960, an editorial of *Die*

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<sup>636</sup> The church’s calling is underscored by naming the enemies it faced: in 1862, it is said, doctrinal purity was at stake: “But today even the very existence of the church is threatened and adversaries organise themselves to destroy the holy institute together with its Christ” (Editorial, 1962c: 596). The whole world is depicted as being in a crisis, with the fear of a third world war “dominating all relationships and negotiations” (596). Congregants are also called upon to beware of the “yeast of Communism” with its “infiltrating influence” that works through “entertainment, reading material, and art”, and to recognise the dangers: “Die Algemene Sinode is bekommerd oor die gerustheid, selfs onverskilligheid, waarmee duisende lidmate voortlewe asof daar geen gevaar bestaan nie ... As daar ooit ’n tyd was dat die gelowige in sy huisgesin, sy kerk en sy samelewing moet vasstaan op die beginsels van Jesus Christus, dan is dit nou. Die stryd woed hier rondom ons. Deur kerkloosheid, ongeloof en losbandigheid word ons magteloos om die vyand te weerstaan” (Editorial, 1962c: 596).

<sup>637</sup> Not only the church of Christ, but the whole Afrikaans nation’s survival is threatened. It has probably never before occurred in the history of the world that so many nations opposed with so much anger a single nation. The church does not dare close its eyes to the distress in which the nation finds itself. Without stepping on the state’s turf, we admonish the believers to be vigilant, strong and firm, ready for any sacrifices that the Lord may require from us.

*Kerkbode* distinguished three possible ways to view this phenomenon: a painful tragedy, a wise disposition, or an inevitable reality<sup>638</sup> (Editorial, 1960d: 852). It is argued that none of these interpretations can be singled out, but that the reality of multiple churches entails a bit of all three these things: tragedy, wisdom, and inevitability.

In this line of thought doctrinal diversity arising from groups like the Roman Catholics, for example, was depicted as a tragic phenomenon which cannot be explained as “the unfolding of the richness of grace given to humanity in Christ” (Editorial, 1960d: 852).<sup>639</sup> Contrary to this, however, the variety of forms that the church takes on among different peoples and nations are said to be wise and reflective of “something of the divine law and wise order” (852). It is emphasised that Christian rebirth does not “annul natural connections and backgrounds” (852-853). Elsewhere, the essence of this outlook is crisply expressed:

Indeed, the Christian unity, or any cooperation for the sake of a broader communal goal or ideal, can never replace differences that are of a natural kind. The Christian religion did not come to annul or replace the natural life, but to sanctify it ... To wish away [the different population groups of our country] with the magic spell of Christian unity, will not help (Editorial, 1960e: 516).

With this multifaceted view on diversity, the DRC was able to develop a theological argument that affirmed the imperative for unification within the DRC while advancing the state policy of racial segregation.<sup>640</sup> This was mainly achieved by conflating issues of unity and diversity within the DRC family of churches with a supposedly ecumenical vision – one that had to allow for diversity. Moreover, the reality of diversity was depicted as a “world phenomenon” and therefore the DRC’s view on it is not only viewed as something that pertains to the South African reality, but indeed to a problem of the world (Editorial, 1960d: 852).

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<sup>638</sup> In 1961 the same issue was on the table, but this time the distinction was tragedy and sin. See Editorial 1961: 68-69.

<sup>639</sup> One form of this tragedy is understood to be manifest in the existence of Roman Catholics and Russellites. For the author, it is obvious that these differences cannot be bridged for the sake of unity. Another manifestation of this tragedy, however, is said to be the divide between churches with the same confessional base. This is a divide that should be overcome (Editorial, 1960d: 852).

<sup>640</sup> The DRC recognised the impact that their theological claims had on state policies, as is clear from a 1960 editorial in *Die Kerkbode* stating that it “can rightly be claimed that ecclesial differences are at the root of more than one disagreement related to policies of the state. After all, it is the church’s calling to reflect on fundamental principles. And this is where the ways part. We have different interpretations of God’s plan for an ordered society. And this difference is echoed in clashing policies for practical politics” (Editorial, 1960e: 516).

It was also from this point of view that the DRC defended its own mission policy when it came under attack for the ways in which it created and maintained racial segregation. It was argued that the DRC's mission policy was aligned with the ecumenical vision (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 612).<sup>641</sup>

This perspective went hand in hand with a specific understanding of what unity in Christ means for the Church. One thing was for sure, if in Christ divisions were overcome, it was not those divisions which pertain to "natural differences":<sup>642</sup>

Die middelmuur van skeiding wat tussen mense neergehaal word, is nie die natuurlike onderskeidinge en grense tussen volkere nie<sup>643</sup> (Editorial, 1960d: 852).<sup>644</sup>

In order to maintain this position with credibility, the spiritual existence of the church was

<sup>641</sup> In his opening speech of the meeting of the Council of the Churches in 1953, A.J. van der Merwe argued that the DRC mission policy is in agreement with a healthy ecumenical vision: "En aangesien hierdie verdenking [dat die erkenning en handhawing van verskeidenheid onversoenbaar is met die eenheid van die liggaam van Christus] vandag besonder sterk gerig word teen ons eie Kerk as gevolg van ons sendingbeleid wat geskoei is op die leer van ons tradisionele houding ten opsigte van die rasseverskille wat daar in ons land bestaan, so sou ek nou daartoe wil oorgaan om die vraag te stel of die beleid van afsonderlike Kerke vir blankes en gekleurdes in stryd is met die ekumeniese strewe wat ek so pas bepleit het? Of – om dit nou maar eenvoudig te stel – staan ons sendingbeleid veroordeel deur die gesindheid van Christus, soos dit tot uitdrukking kom in die gebed van eenheid waarvoor ons tot u spreek, sowel as in die beginsels wat Christus vir ons deur woord en voorbeeld neergelê het?" (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 612). The DRC's esteem for the ecumenical movement faded towards the end of the 1950s, and particularly after the Cottesloe Consultation of 1960. B.J. Marais interpreted an editorial of *Die Kerkbode* that had a negative stance to unity as a critique of the World Council of Churches. See Editorial 1961: 68-69 and Marais 1961: 198.

<sup>642</sup> A 1961 article by V.D.M. uses John 10:16 to argue this point. "En die woord 'nie' (ouk) is 'n eenvoudige en duidelike negatief, wat nie in die sin van 'nog nie' opgevat kan word nie: 'Ander skape wat nie tot hierdie stal behoort nie' hou dus die betekenis van: 'Ander skape wat afgesonder en afgeskeie van hierdie stal is ...' Ek was op 'n keer op 'n boereplaas, en ek het gemerk dat die boer sy Persiese skape en sy mofskape in twee afsonderlike krale en kampe gehou het ... Die eenheid van Christus het dus te doen met die persoonlike, wedersydse betrekking tussen Christus en die gelowiges, maar beteken nie die eenvormigheid van die gelowiges op elke gebed van die lewe nie" (V.D.M., 1961: 723).

<sup>643</sup> The shared wall of division broken down between people is not the natural divisions and boundaries between peoples.

<sup>644</sup> In 1959, J.J. Muller argues the same point: "Hiermee word nie bedoel dat in die nuwe lewe, as mense Christene word, die bestaande en godgewilde verskille in die natuurlike orde en menslike lewensverbande opgehef word nie. Die apostel handel hier nie oor wat in die volkere-verhoudinge of in die maatskaplike lewe geld of moet geld nie; op daardie terrein eis hy die eerbiediging van bestaande onderskeide en verskille ... Onesimus, die bekeerde slaaf, word teruggestuur na sy eienaar en heer as slaaf, hoewel hy in Christus nou 'meer is as 'n slaaf ...' Christen-diensknegte egter moet nog aan hul base na die vlees diensbaar en gehoorsaam wees, soos aan Christus, soos mense wat die wil van God van harte doen ... Maar oor al hierdie 'natuurlike' verskeidenheid het daar 'n nuwe siening gekom by die 'nuwe mens': by alle gebrek aan eenvormigheid het daar 'n dieper eenheid tot openbaring gekom" (Muller, 1959: 272).

exalted over the physical, embodied existence:

It is therefore not in the first instance a matter of formal outward organisation or even complete uniformity of doctrine, but it is a deep, living unity that bears the fruit of true communion between the believer and his Lord ... The unity for which our Saviour prayed does not demand that differences be wiped out, but also leaves room for differences of opinion that will guarantee that this unity will never become something rigid and lifeless. Christian unity is not necessarily sameness<sup>645</sup> (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 612).<sup>646</sup>

The weight given to the spiritual over and above the physical also influenced the DRC's positioning of itself in relation to the apartheid state. In 1959, J.J. Muller commented on the prominence of the term "apartheid" in the public discourse and the various apartheid laws which have been instituted. In the face of these political and social realities, he writes, and the continuous emphasis on otherness and difference among people, there is a different spiritual reality – the sphere of God's kingdom (Muller, 1959: 270). Here the emphasis is on unity and not division, Muller continues, on sameness and not otherness, and on the equality and not the inequality of believers before God (270). With this line of thought, however, Muller affirms the apartheid state as well as the distinction between the spiritual and the physical world: "Apartheid mag dus nooit 'n lewenshouding word wat ons ook geestelik in aparte wêrelde laat leef nie"<sup>647</sup> (270). For Muller, as for many of his contemporaries, "a deeper, organic unity" was holding the church together while it was organisationally separated (270). "On the basis of God's Word, the Church proclaims the unity and spiritual equality of all believers in Christ – no matter how separated and different they may be in other respects" (270-271). He continues:

Teenoor die natuurlike apartheid waarin hulle verkeer het en nog verkeer, as lede van verskillende volke, met verskillende tale en agtergrond, het daar as 'n allesoorheersende nuwe werklikheid te staan gekom die feit dat hulle één is in Christus, één in geloof, één in hul verbondenheid aan God – kinders van dieselfde hemelse Vader en dus ook broers van dieselfde geestelike huis. En op daardie gebied was daar eintlik net één ding wat getel het: Christus! ... Die

<sup>645</sup> See also Editorial 1961: 68: "Daar is egter aan die ander kant mense wat vreedzaamheid en eenstemmigheid tussen kerke verwar met vroomheid of met die ware eenheid in Christus."

<sup>646</sup> Van der Merwe nevertheless held that there was no real scriptural basis for the ecclesial separation or unification of people of different races: "Persoonlik meen ek dat die Heilige Skrif nergens die beginsel van afsonderlike Kerke vir persone wat nie tot dieselfde ras behoort nie as 'n absolute vereiste stel nie; terselfdertyd weier ek om dit aan te neem dat die beleid van afsonderlike Kerke, wanneer dit deur faktore van positiewe sowel as negatiewe aard geveg word, verbied word deur enigiets wat Jesus Christus ons deur woord en voorbeeld geleer het. In die raamwerk van die lewende Eenheid waarvoor Hy gebed is, is daar ruimte vir verskeidenheid" (Van der Merwe 1953b: 623).

<sup>647</sup> "Apartheid may therefore never become a life view that also let us live in separate worlds spiritually."

natuurlike verskeidenheid word oorkoepel deur die genade van God<sup>648</sup>  
(271).<sup>649</sup>

Based on this specific understanding of what unity in Christ means, it was emphasised that one should not only guard against sinful division, dissension and enmity but also against sinful uniformity (Editorial, 1960e: 516). Therefore, a distinction was made between right and wrong applications of the church's drive to unity (516).<sup>650</sup> The supposedly wrong kind of unity was described as one in which truth would be "exchanged or sacrificed for the sake of unanimity, tolerance and love" (Editorial, 1961: 68).<sup>651</sup> This truth, for the DRC, was a divine and practical truth: "natural" differences between people was the most important reality to be honoured. Therefore, a reality check was necessary for those who supported unity at all cost: the acceptance "that the population of South Africa is not homogeneous and do not want to be homogeneous" (Editorial, 1960e: 516).

The support for unqualified unity was blamed on the influence of "international politics with its slogan of tolerance and the so-called broad vision, the "skoonklinkende ideaal van die wêreldpolitiek"<sup>652</sup>, or the subtle methods of Communism to win the church over to its cause (Editorial, 1961: 68). It is said to give rise to a "soetsappige vredesgekoer" that is also being heard in the churches. It is of critical importance for the church to resist these ideals of peace and unity, and not to mistake them for Christian piety:

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<sup>648</sup> In relation to the natural apartheid in which they found themselves and still find themselves, as members of different peoples, with different languages and backgrounds, an all-encompassing new reality came into being in that they are one in Christ, one in faith, one in their commitment to God – children of the same heavenly Father and therefore also brothers of the same spiritual home. And on that terrain, there was only really one thing that counted: Christ! ... The natural variation is overarched by the grace of God.

<sup>649</sup> Muller continued: "Maatskaplike standsverskille of teenstellinge is geen skeidsmure wat op godsdienstige terrein ook skei en mense die gemeenskap van Christus en met mekaar as geloofsgenote ontsê nie ... Die evangelie vind onderdane van Christus onder alle nasies en tale en stande van die samelewing, en in Hom is hulle één. In Christus het alles nuut geword: nuwe verhoudings het ingetree, en nuwe gesindhede word geopenbaar deur die nuwe mens ... Daar moet orals die bewys gelewer word van goeie wil en goeie trou, en van meelewe in Christelike gees, en onderlinge bedagsaamheid en hulpvaardigheid. Of ons in aparte gebiede woon, op aparte kieserslyste geplaas is, aparte treingeriewe geniet – dit moet nie verhinder dat ons op die algemeen-menslike terrein as medemense optree en as mede-Christene mekaar vind, mekaar ken en mekaar liefhet nie" (Muller, 1959: 272).

<sup>650</sup> This reminds one of the distinction between right and wrong generosity discussed in chapter 5 (see 5.3.3.).

<sup>651</sup> This was also articulated in terms of what "true love" would consist of: "Wie eerlik liefhet – God en sy naaste – moet dikwels onverdraagsaam wees ter wille van die eer van God en die heil van die naaste" (Editorial, 1961: 68).

<sup>652</sup> "specious ideal of world politics"

Daar is 'n soort eenstemmigheid wat ook op sy manier deur godsdienstige opvattinge geïnspireer word, maar dis dié soort eenstemmigheid wat Christus gekruisig het!<sup>653</sup> (Editorial, 1961: 69).

It is important to note how the DRC based its position, not in the first place on a theological vision, but as a reaction on supposedly urgent practical problems. In the same way that present challenges were cited as a reason for the urgency of unification among the white DRC churches (see 6.8.1.), it was now cited as justification for separation. The mission policy was defended as an answer to looming chaos:

As dit erken word – soos ook dr Marais in sy boek doen – dat die aktuele situasie in ons land dit wenslik maak dat daar segregasie op kerklike gebied sal wees, tensy ons op chaos wil afstuur, waarom sou daar dan diegene wees wat 'n sendingbeleid van onchristelikheid verdink wat rekening hou met wat wenslik en gebiedend is? En as dit nou inderdaad die doel sowel as die uitwerking van hierdie beleid was om ons van chaos te red ...<sup>654</sup> (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 623).<sup>655</sup>

One can therefore argue for a continuing line of self-justification based on the interpretation of historical events. Being faithful to the teaching of the church (and indeed the Reformation) is to be faithful to the forefathers and their work.<sup>656</sup> This again means

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<sup>653</sup> There is kind of unanimity that, also in its own way, is inspired by religious views, but it is this kind of unanimity that crucified Christ!

<sup>654</sup> If it is admitted – as Dr Malan does in his book – that the current situation in our country makes it desirable that there should be segregation on churchly terrain, unless we want to fall into chaos, why would there then be those that suspect a missionary policy that takes into account what is desirable and peremptory of being unchristian? And if it was now indeed the aim and the result of this policy were to save us from chaos ...

<sup>655</sup> Van der Merwe also argued that the mission policy can in fact be seen as God's providence, because it was slowly revealed that differences between people were not simply racial but actually more profound: people also had very different "mentalities". Van der Merwe states: "Bewys hierdie nuwe ontwikkelinge op sendinggebied nie dat daar, benewens kleurverskil tussen die verskillende rasse-groepe, ook 'n verskil in mentaliteit en aanvoeling is waarmee daar selfs tussen die verskillende groepe van die gekleurde bevolking rekening gehou moet word nie? En mog hierdie oorweging ook al aanvanklik nie die hoofrol gespeel het nie, so het dit met die verloop van jare tog bo alle twyfel aan die lig gekom in die beplanning en uitvoering van ons sendingtaak. En so het gebeur, wat meermale in die voorsienigheid van God gebeur, dat uit die onvolmaakte en gebrekkige die goeie gebore word" (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 613).

<sup>656</sup> This included the work of the relatively recent forefathers. Criticism of the DRC's mission policy was regarded as ungratefulness towards the sacrifices made for it in the past: "[W]aarom daarvan spreek as die vrug van 'n afwyking van die regte pad wat êrens in ons geskiedenis plaasgevind het? Nie alleen piëteit teenoor hulle wat ons sendingbeleid aangevoer het nie, maar ook dankbare erkenning van die offers wat aan die ontwikkeling daarvan bestee is, maak dit vir ons onmoontlik om dit aan te neem dat hierdie beleid bedoel was om van loutere negatiewe strekking te wees. Ons dink aan die honderde seuns van ons volk wat, onder 'n besef van hul roeping ten opsigte van die geestelike welsyn van die gekleurdtes in ons land, hul lewe met onbaatsugtige toewyding in diens van die Sending op die altaar gelê het. Ons dink aan die

being faithful to the form of the church received from them. To open itself for criticism of the mission policy would draw into question various other historical markers of identity. In the same manner that the idea of unity in diversity developed over time, the insistence of the 1930s “to be more and more ourselves” developed into particular priorities and specific interpretations of the present.<sup>657</sup>

The appreciation for what is “our own” was also seen as a calling “to be ourselves” that Christians had to obey. This made diversity inevitable.<sup>658</sup>

#### 5.7.4. *The limits of unity*

The inconsistency in the DRC’s rationale for unity reached a climax in the aftermath of the 1962 unification. A controversy among theologians of the DRC broke out when W.D. Jonker argued that the unification should also include the so-called daughter churches. This position was proposed in his analysis and critique of the DRC’s mission policy in his work *Sendingbepalinge van die Ned. Geref. Kerk van Transvaal* (Jonker, 1962). T.N. Hanekom reacted to it, accusing Jonker of propagating “Roman” ideas in the DRC. A robust polemic ensued in the pages of *Die Kerkbode*.<sup>659</sup>

Jonker argued that what Hanekom depicts as “Roman” is two basic theological claims that were for him very much Reformed: first, the claim that “Scripture teaches us that the church of Christ on earth ought to be visibly one” and, second, that “all true congregations or churches of Jesus Christ who share the same Scriptural confession *have the calling and duty*<sup>660</sup> to manifest their inner unity by coming together in one denomination” (Jonker, 1963a: 436). For Jonker, this is a calling and an obligation. Therefore, he emphasised, “churches do not have the freedom to remain separate denominations if they prefer so” (436).<sup>661</sup> Only “substantial reasons” may justify a church’s decision to remain on its own,

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groot geldelike bydrae ... wat slegs uit een bron kon gevloei het, en dit is liefde vir die sieleheil van die gekleurde vir wie die moontlikheid geskep is om God in eie kring te dien” (Van der Merwe, 1953b: 623).

<sup>657</sup> This point of departure (“the own”) can also be seen in a 1960 editorial in *Die Kerkbode*: “Ons moet erken dat elke groep die reg het om sy eiendomlikheid te waardeer, te handhaaf en uit te bou ... elkeen het die roeping om sy eie geheilig diensbaar te stel aan sy Skepper” (Editorial, 1960e: 516).

<sup>658</sup> The idea is expressed somewhat differently in 1961: “Daar word ook vergeet dat alhoewel die waarheid van God objektief één is, dit subjektief nooit in sy geheel deur een volledig geken of besit word nie – ook nie uitsluitend in één teologiese sisteem nie” (Editorial, 1961: 68). See also Editorial 1963f: 348.

<sup>659</sup> See also Rosslee 1963b: 95 and Malan 1963: 874-877. For Rosslee, numbers was a definite factor to be considered. He mentions the fact that the white DRC will be outnumbered in a General Synod where all the church in the DRC family are represented (Rosslee, 1963b: 95).

<sup>660</sup> Original emphasis

<sup>661</sup> Original emphasis.



and for Jonker only the rejection of God's Word counted as such a substantial reason (436). Drawing on Bouwman, Jonker argued that to be free does not mean that one is allowed to be arbitrary or extremist. The church is only free to be obedient to God and to do what it is called to do (436). To refuse would mean disobedience to God (436).

Jonker piercingly pointed out the DRC's inconsistency in its rationale for unity:

[G]lo ons dan nie almal aan die noodsaaklikheid van 'n kerkverband tussen al die Ned. Geref. gemeentes nie, en het ons dan nie nog onlangs onder tekens van diepe bewoëheid die vyf Ned. Geref. Kerke in een kerkverband herenig met één Algemene Sinode as die uitdrukking daarvan nie? Niemand het dit, of die drang daartoe, Rooms genoem nie. Hierdie hele redenasie word egter vir sommige mense 'Rooms' sodra hulle hoor dat iemand uit die bestaande die gevolgtrekking maak dat daar dus ook 'n innerlike noodsaaklikheid bestaan dat die Ned Geref. Moeder- en Dogter-kerke in één kerkverband saamgesnoer moet wees. Daarom is dit nodig dat ons daarop moet wys dat die gereformeerde kerkreg nie die noodsaaklikheid van die kerkverband gekwalifiseer het deur te sê dat dit net geld sover die lands-, volks-, taal-, kleur- of rassegrense strek nie, maar, inteendeel, dat dit bedoel is om alle ware kerke van Jesus Christus te omvat, en só iets van die katolisiteit (algemeenheid) van die kerk sigbaar te maak<sup>662</sup> (436).

Jonker emphasises that, according to Calvin, it is the "one, true confession" that constitutes the visible, Catholic Church – across cultural and racial differences (437). He later argues that according to Reformed church order, Scripture demands "a denomination between churches of the same confession" (Jonker, 1963c: 97).<sup>663</sup> Drawing on the church order of Dordt, he argues that there is room for the existence of congregations with different languages, but that these should all be joined in one

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<sup>662</sup> Do all of us not believe in the necessity of an association among all the Dutch Reformed congregations, and have we not recently bound the five Dutch Reformed Churches into one association – an event marked by deep emotion – with one General Synod as expression of this? No one called it, or the urge for it, Roman. However, this whole argument becomes 'Roman' as soon as they hear that someone from the existing order reaches the conclusion that there therefore also exists an inner necessity that the Dutch Reformed Mother- and Daughter churches should be bound into one church association. Therefore, it is important that we should point out that the Reformed church polity did not qualify the necessity of this church association by stating that it only counts for the boundaries of country, people, language, colour or race, but, instead, that it is meant to embody all true churches of Jesus Christ, and thus make visible something of the church's Catholicity (generality).

<sup>663</sup> See also Barnard (1963): "Dit is waar dat die eenheid nie in die eerste plaas deur 'n sinodale verband bewerk word nie. Dít bestaan in die eenheid van belydenis, van kerkregering en liturgie. Maar hierdie innerlike eenheid moet ook tot gestalte kom in die uiterlike eenheid, want hoe anders kan die belydenis en die kerkregering en liturgie bepaal en onderskryf word as dit nie ook is waar die verskillende gemeentes dit gesamentlik doen nie? – en dit is wat die sinode wil wees" (Barnard, 1963: 129).

denomination with one church order and one general synod (438).

Die Sinode van Dordrecht 1618–1619 was nog 'n laaste glans aan die Westerkim as herinnering daaraan dat egte gereformeerde ook katoliek is en roep om die sigbare openbaring van die één, algemene kerk<sup>664</sup> (438).

Reformed theology respects diversity, Jonker argues, while demanding visible unity that finds expression in one denomination. Those who mistake this for “Roman unity”, Jonker writes, has the logic of “someone who sees a post box for a Communist: both are red, after all” (Jonker, 1963b: 470).

Jonker boiled the above-mentioned down to the heart of the controversy by asking if it is justifiable for two churches who adhere to the Biblical conditions of true unity to exist apart from each other simply because their congregants are of different languages and skin colours (Jonker, 1963c: 97). He accused Hanekom of accepting a principle when it pertains to whites, and rejecting it as “Roman” when it is applied to blacks (97-98). A.C. Barnard, too, pointed out that the “prevailing aversion in the unity of the church” mainly stemmed from “the fear of potential contact between black and white Christians” (Barnard, 1963: 129).

J.J.F. Durand highlighted a different inconsistency in the arguments against the unification of white and black churches in the DRC family: the priority of the supposedly spiritual realm over that of the physical. For him, the case for the invisibility of the church was overstretched, and this had implications for how the local church was seen to be related to the catholic church (Durand, 1963: 96):

[E]en van die mees algemene goëltoertjies [wat met die sigbaarheid en onsigbaarheid van die kerk uitgevoer word is] ... die gedagte, n.l. dat die onsigbare kerk identies is met die algemene kerk, losgedink van alle organisatoriese en institutêre [aspekte]. Die algemene kerk word eenvoudig uitgelig bo die sfeer van die empiriese ... Hierdie gedagte is wel baie handig om die Bybelse imperatief van kerklike eenheid te ontloop, maar ongelukkig is dit, op sy minste, 'n Platoniserende gedagte en beslis nie 'n Skriftuurlike nie. Die sigbaarheid en onsigbaarheid van die kerk kongrueer nie met die onderskeiding plaaslike en algemene kerk nie ... 'n Kerkverband kan nie anders wees as een nie. Die plaaslike kerke kan nie anders wees as een nie. Die plaaslike kerke kan nie willekeurig gaan beslis met watter ander plaaslike kerke hulle een of 'n meertal kerkverbande gaan vorm nie ... Wie dit nie wil

<sup>664</sup> The Synod of Dordt 1618–1619 was still a last semblance on the Western horizon as reminder that true reformedness is also catholic and calls for the visible revelation of the one, general church.

erken nie, moet aanvaar dat daar meer as een liggaam van Christus is met korresponderende verskillende plaaslike openbarings<sup>665</sup> (96).<sup>666</sup>

The majority of DRC voices continued to defend the DRC's right not to unify with black churches.<sup>667</sup> The "lack of organised unity", it was argued, is that which "guarantees our freedom in Christ" (Editorial, 1963h: 316). Unity was primarily seen as something that one must be able to "truly experience" (316). "Unity cannot be brought about by being together physically in the same church building" (316). Physical togetherness could only be an expression of unity that already existed (316). Cultural differences, it was argued, will hamper rather than promote the experience of that true unity:

Baie van wat teenswoordig aangedui word as bewyse of openbaringe van Christelike eenheid, is wel 'n gesamentlikheid in 'n gees van broederskap en welwillendheid, met inagneming van sekere algemene beginsels, maar is nie eenheid van siel in die waarheid van wat eendersluidend bely word nie, terwyl die eenheid van kerkregering en van erediens nog verder op die agtergrond staan. Maar die ware geestelike gemeenskap en geestelike eensvoelendheid het wesenlik méér met belydenis, kerkregering en erediens te doen as met Christelike hoflikheid wat ons aan almal verskuldig is. Selfs waar kerke op dieselfde belydenis staan en min of meer dieselfde kerkregering het, kan die geestelike klimaat daarin en die natuurlike eienskappe van volksgroepe wat daaraan behoort, so verskillend te wees dat hulle saamwees in een instituut en in een erediens eerder die belewing van die eenheid en gemeenskap strem as bevorder<sup>668</sup> (316-317).

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<sup>665</sup> One of the most common conjuring tricks which is conducted with the visibility and invisibility of the church ... the thought, i.e. that the invisible church is identical to the general church, released by thinking from all organisational and institutional aspects. The general church is simply raised above the level of the empirical ... This thought in facts comes in handy to evade the Biblical imperative of churchly unity, but unfortunately it is, at the very least, a Platonic thought and certainly not a scriptural one. The visibility and invisibility of the church is not congruent with the separation of local and general Churches ... A church denomination cannot be anything but one. The local churches cannot be anything but one. The local churches cannot arbitrarily decide with which other local churches they want to form one or more associations ... Whoever does not want to admit this should accept that there is more than one body of Christ with corresponding different local revelations.

<sup>666</sup> This point was also made by A.C. Barnard who referred to the Belgic Confession (articles 27 and 28), the Heidelberg Catechism (questions and answers 54-55 and 76) and the 1542 Catechism of Calvin (article 100) (Barnard, 1963: 129).

<sup>667</sup> On 26 September 1963, *Die Kerkbode* declared: "Dat daar aparte kerke is, is dus nie 'n verskynsel wat slegs vanweë die swakheid van sommige *geduld* word nie; *dis wenslik!*" (Editorial 1963g: 424).

<sup>668</sup> A lot of what is currently provided as evidence for or revelations of Christian unity is indeed a togetherness in a spirit of brotherhood and goodwill, with regard to certain general principles, but is not unity of the soul in the confession of the same truth, while the unity of church governance and service is further in the background. But the true spiritual community and feeling of spiritual unity in fact relate more to confession, church governance and service than to Christian courtesy to which we are all indebted. Even where churches have the same confession and more or less the same church government, the spiritual

These voices agreed that church order and confession were the basis of church unity,<sup>669</sup> but it also added liturgy to this list. This served as an immediate disqualifier of the possibility of unity because of the relatively different styles of worship among the churches. Rather, it was suggested, there were different “degrees of unity” determined by “practical circumstances”, that is, cultural and linguistic differences (Strauss, 1963a: 336; 1963b: 738ff.). A similar idea was proposed by Skeen with his concept “degrees of separation” (Skeen, 1963: 337).

It was also argued that one had to be aware of the *type* of unity one supports: “Nou is dit egter juis hier waar ons baie versigtig moet wees om nie ’n eenheidsvoorstelling of kerklike eenwording te bepleit wat onverantwoordelik, onrealisties of onbybels is nie”<sup>670</sup> (Editorial, 1963c: 348). A church modelled on the early Christian church as the ideal church, it was argued, is not realistic. It was said that the time of the apostles is not relevant for today, and it is useless to try and “force the church back to its childhood of relative formlessness” (348). Similarly, Strauss argued that the cultural and linguistic differences the DRC was dealing with were completely different from those known by the “reformed fathers” (Strauss, 1963a: 336). Strauss continues:

En as ons posisie anders is, het ons dan nie ook met ander ‘praktiese omstandighede’ en ander ‘eise van menslike noodsaaklikheid’ te doen nie? Natuurlik, en juis daarom is ons in normatiewe gehoorsaamheid geroepe om vir óns besondere situasie ook sy besondere eenheidsgraad en gehegtheid te kies. Waarom hierdie normatiewe keusevryheid slegs aan die vadere laat?<sup>671</sup> (336).

In Strauss’s argument, then, we again find the strong emphasis on the present, and a significant distance between that present and the church of the apostles and the

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climate and the natural characteristics of national groups that belong to them can be so different that their being together in one institution and in one service strain rather than enhance the unity of community.

<sup>669</sup> In this time, Beyers Naudé founded the *Christian Institute* and provoked severe criticism from the DRC. B.B. Keet reacted to this pointing out that the critique was not founded on confessional truths but on ecclesial policy based on different interpretations of Scripture. The DRC’s interpretation of Scripture, Keet continued, had always been “brilliantly isolated from other Christian churches” (Keet, 1963: 540). *Die Kerkbode* of 9 October 1963 also reacted against the claim that the DRC retracted to a position of “fear-stricken isolation” (Editorial, 1963e: 489). See also Editorial 1963f: 380-381.

<sup>670</sup> “Now, however, it is exactly here where we should be very careful not to advocate a suggestion for unity or churchly unification that is irresponsible, unrealistic and unbiblical.”

<sup>671</sup> And if our position is different, are we not encountering other ‘practical circumstances’ and other ‘demands of humane importance’? Of course, and exactly therefore we are called in normative obedience to choose the degree of unity and attachment for our particular situation. Why leave this normative freedom of choice only to the fathers?

reformers. F.E. O'B. Geldenhuys and W.C. Malan, however, needed an authoritative past for their arguments. According to Malan, the church is faced by a murky ecumenism dating back to the days of the ecumenical councils of the early church, but God led a big part of his church out of this ecumenical darkness through Luther and Calvin (Malan, 1963: 875). In his turn, Geldenhuys uses the past to endorse his argument of “that which is our own” should be prioritised:

Daarom moet ons begin deur weer erns te maak met wat ons eie is; deur weer eens te besef dat my kerk geword het wat hy is om redes wat vir diegene wat voor my uitgegaan het, as eg en grondig beskou was. Laat ons dan vir die oomblik aanvaar dat dit in die oë van die vadere goed en reg was dat hierdie bepaalde kerk sekere standpunte en oortuigings sou huldig. Laat ons begin om weer die goeie in ons eie te sien, te waardeer en met erns te bely en te bevorder<sup>672</sup> (Geldenhuys, 1963: 868-869).<sup>673</sup>

Ironically, Strauss fully grasped the consequences of the position advocated by Jonker, Durand and others, but implied that they were unwilling to see it through. Strauss claimed the moral high ground for his position, because it was one that could apply to the whole of reality. To quote him at length:

Wie in Christus een is, is dus in beginsel ook een in Christelike liefde en moraal, Christelike reg en politiek, Christelike kuns en skoonheid, Christelike besparing en ekonomie, Christelike omgang en verkeer, Christelike taal en Christelike denke, ens., sowel as in Christelike huwelik en gesin, Christelike staat en party, Christelike teater, bedryf, vriendekring en taalgemeenskap, Christelike skool en universiteit, ens. Werklik, wie in Christus een is, is daardeur sulke allesdekkende eenheidslote in die ware Wynstok dat selfs onderlinge rasse-, volkere- en beskawingsverskille aan hierdie eenheid geen afbreuk doen nie.

Indien die pleitbesorgers van die onderhawige gedagterigting dus konsekwent is – en nie Christus se Koningskap tot godsdiens en kerk beperk nie – moet hulle met dieselfde oortuiging pleit vir die eenheid van blanke en nie-blanke Christene in bv. gemengde staat en party, gemengde skool en universiteit, ens., om sodoende ook reg te laat geskied aan ons sigbare liefdes, politieke, kuns-, ekonomiese, sosiale, taal-, onderwys- en wetenskapseenheid in Christus.

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<sup>672</sup> Therefore, we should get serious about that which is ours; by again realising that my church became what it is because of reasons considered true and valid by those who came before me. Let us assume for the moment that it was good and right in the eyes of the fathers that this particular church would uphold certain views and convictions. Let us start seeing, appreciating and confessing and promoting the good in what is ours.

<sup>673</sup> See also the 1963 editorial in *Die Kerkbode* “Die stam waaruit ons groei (1685 en ons)” (1963d: 553).

Teen die agtergrond van voorgaande lê dit voor die hand dat die voorstanders van die onderhawige gedagterigting die aard van ons eenheid in Christus verkeerd uitlê – en dit o.m. omdat hulle die Koningskap van Christus tot die gebied van godsdiens en kerk vereng ...

Ja, só geforseerd is die aard van hulle eenheidsidee dat hulle die konsekwensies daarvan nie aandurf nie, omdat hulle dan nie tot rus mag kom vóór hulle die lidmate van moeder- en dogterkerke nie tot op die laaste siel laat ondertrou het nie ...<sup>674</sup> (Strauss, 1963b: 738-739).<sup>675</sup>

### 5.7.5. *Memory, rationality and imagination*

Although the theological grounding of the DRC's unification was in its shared confessional basis, the arguments discussed above indicate that the motivation for unification lay elsewhere. The drive to unify was not based on a theological conviction, but on an experience of the world.

Following Connerton, we can argue that the DRC's experience of the world was informed by their knowledge of the past. Their images of the past created and legitimated a specific social order. Moreover, the ways in which the DRC's memory of its Confessions were entangled with its memory in general shaped its ecclesial embodiment of the Confessions.

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<sup>674</sup> Those who are one in Christ are therefore in principle also one in Christian love and morale, Christian law and politics, Christian art and beauty, Christian language and Christian thought, etc., as well as in Christian marriage and family, Christian state and party, Christian theatre, business, friendships and language community, Christian school and university, etc. Truly, those who are one in Christ are thereby such all-embodying trenches of unity in the true Vine that not even divisions of race, peoples and differences in civilisation can damage this unity.

If the advocates of the present line of thought are thus consistent – and they do not limit the Kingship of Christ to religion and church – they should advocate the unity of white and non-white Christians with the same conviction in e.g. mixed state and party, mixed school and university, etc., to also do justice in this way to our visible loves, politics, art, economic, social, language, education and scientific unity in Christ.

Against the above background, it is clear that the advocates of the present line of thought interpret the nature of our unity in Christ incorrectly – and this is because, amongst others, they limit the Kingship of Christ to the terrain of religion and church ...

Yes, so forced is the nature of their idea of unity that they do not confront its consequences, because then they may not rest until they have intermarried the congregants of mother- and daughter churches to the last soul ...

<sup>675</sup> Strauss emphasised that Christian unity was unity in Christ and not equality with one another: “Nog eens, laat ons roem in Christus, ons Eenheid, maar dan ook besef dat die lidmate van moeder- en dogterkerke (onder die Koningskap van Christus) tot 'n *helder sigbare* eenheid in Christus kom deur die eenheid van hul Christelike lewensbelydenis en nie deur gelykheid in mekaar nie ... So bly Christus hul eenheid – onvervangbaar deur onderlinge gelykheid. In álles sigbaar Christelik één deur die volle klem op ons *sigbare eenheidsdiens van God met ons hele hart in Christus, ons Eenheid* – en nie ons gelykheid in mekaar nie” (Strauss, 1963b: 739).

History and memory conditioned its imagination, rationality and sense of community and justice. It also conditioned the DRC's understanding of the Gospel.

The tenacity of this memory, I would argue, was invigorated and sustained by the DRC's commemorative calendar. As Connerton argues, "rites permeate also non-ritual behaviour and mentality ... They are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with respect to a set of further non-ritual actions, to the whole of life of a community" (Connerton, 1989: 974). The DRC's unification is an example of such a non-ritual action influenced by communal rituals.

The unity that it came to embody was, in line with earlier understandings of what it meant to be a confessional church, characterised by seclusion: unity meant definite borders. These borders were believed to be based on "natural differences" between people, in the same way that the unity that members of the DRC experienced among themselves was said to be a "natural occurrence".

## 5.8. Conclusion

This chapter investigated and explicated the close link between commemoration and identity. It started out by discussing the DRC's emphasis on "keeping thy feasts" and highlighting the moral imperatives that went hand in hand with it. The well-being of the church was said to be related to the way it observed its festivals. The chapter then focused on the accompanying drive to develop the history of the DRC and construct certain historical continuities – particularly between the DRC and Jan van Riebeeck, and the DRC and the *Voortrekkers*.

What is notable about the continuities that were construed is the equal emphasis on continuity with the Reformation and continuity with the *volk*. The continuity with the *volk* is proved by emphasising the DRC's loyalty to the *volk* throughout its history. We thus see how loyalty to the *volk* and loyalty to the Reformed heritage (particularly the Reformed Confessions) are put on the same level.

An extensive commemorative calendar developed within the DRC, creating specific times and places for people to re-enact their history. The chapter accordingly provided an overview of these commemorative events, highlighting the specific ways in which people were expected to observe it and also the specific hopes with which people did so.

Compared to the enthusiasm about history and commemoration in general, the commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism stands as a non-event. It seems that the Heidelberg Catechism as an active site of memory was largely overpowered by other commemorative events.



Although it is the confession that is most embedded in liturgy of all the DRC's confessions, it can hardly be compared to the scale at which other sites of memory were commemorated. It also seems to be the case, when compared to the enthusiasm with which Pentecost services were anticipated, for example, that the liturgical embodiment of the Heidelberg Catechism fell short of stirring emotions. Outside of theological conflict, it is primarily remembered as practised with dryness and cold rationalism.

If we take this finding – together with the work of other scholars about the power of ritual and embodied commemoration – seriously, it might suggest an inherent limit to the potential of Reformed Confessions to shape identities directly. There is of course no lack of historical evidence that confessions shape the identity of communities in profound ways. However, as texts without definite ecclesial liturgical contexts, they are always vulnerable and at risk of being the hostage of cultural liturgies and imaginations.

The last section of the chapter dealt with the long-awaited unification of the DRC synods in 1962. This discussion made it clear that the desirability of unity and the acceptability of diversity among churches were not based on consistent theological arguments but on a specific social imagination.

The question for our consideration is how this imagination was created and maintained. From the historical material covered in this chapter, we can argue that a specific historical narrative combined with a packed commemoration calendar were instrumental in shaping the DRC's vision for society. It also impacted its biblical hermeneutical lens to such an extent that neither criticism from within its own ranks, nor from outside could make any lasting rational appeal to them.

A final good example of this is the DRC's sense-making process in the aftermath of the Cottesloe consultation of 1960. Confronted by the international criticism of the apartheid state and the DRC in the aftermath of the Sharpeville shootings, a letter to *Die Kerkbode* saw the DRC faced with a choice between (their) God and the world. In the letter titled "Noue verband van kerk en volk" (Goosen, 1961: 336), Gys Goosen at first considers the possibility of the DRC being wrong when he writes:

Die wette van die staat was gebaseer op die Woord van God. Nou is die vraag: was hulle reg of verkeerd? Het hulle onbybels gehandel? ... Maar gestel hulle was verkeerd, dan moet ons die verkeerde weg onmiddellik verlaat ...<sup>676</sup> (336).

But then the strong historical narrative sketched above seems to convince him otherwise:

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<sup>676</sup> The laws of the state were based on the Word of God. The question now is: were they right or wrong? Did they act against the Bible? ... But assume they were wrong, then we should leave the wrong path immediately ...

Wie moet ons vrees, God of Mammon? By wie moet ons hulp gaan soek, by die God van ons vaders of by die volke van die wêreld? Wat was die wêreldmening met betrekking tot Christus en Sy leer? Is Hy nie deur die wêreld gekruisig nie? ... dat God ons mag bewaar en help om die kerk van ons vadere te bewaak en ons toekoms daardeur verseker<sup>677</sup> (336).

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<sup>677</sup> Who should we fear, God or Mammon? Whose help should we seek, the God of our fathers or the nations of the world? What was the world view regarding Christ and his doctrine? Was He not crucified by the world? ... so God may protect us and help us to guard the church of our fathers and thus ensure our future.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1. General remarks

This study traced the contours and development of the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory in the DRC between 1862 and 1963. It presupposed that the Heidelberg Catechism was one among many sites of memory of the DRC in the period, and that these sites served as dynamically entangled sources of identity for the DRC. To put it differently: a community's identity is constituted by different dynamically entangled sites of memory, and a confessional document, like the Heidelberg Catechism, can be one such site. This means that, for a community, the meaning of a confession is influenced by how it remembers the confession, and also by the other elements that constitute its collective memory. The study examined and explicated the characteristics and effects of this entanglement in the history of the DRC.

The study aimed to understand how the Heidelberg Catechism was remembered between 1862 and 1963, what stimulated the commemoration of the Catechism, how memories of the Catechism influenced the DRC's confession and embodiment of its faith, what other memories constituted the collective memory of the DRC, and how these memories related to memories of the Heidelberg Catechism.

To answer these questions, relevant archival sources were consulted in two phases: first, I focused on prominent commemoration dates of the Heidelberg Catechism (1863, 1913, 1963) to find material related to the celebration of these anniversaries; secondly, I focused on incidences between 1862 and 1963 where the Heidelberg Catechism became prominent in the discourses of the DRC.

The initial review of sources revealed three aspects of the Heidelberg Catechism in the memory of the DRC. Firstly, the Heidelberg Catechism was not widely commemorated in the DRC in 1863, 1913 or 1963; secondly, the Heidelberg Catechism is often grouped together with the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt and treated as a singular entity – the Formulae of Unity; and thirdly, the Heidelberg Catechism not only functioned as a site of memory for the DRC, but also as a site of forgetting.

## 6.2. Overview of chapters

Over and above these general conclusions, the specific events and discourses traced in each chapter of the study also brought certain aspects of the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory to the fore.

Chapter 2 discussed the Liberal Struggle of the 1860s and the role the Heidelberg Catechism played in this controversy. Although the Liberal Struggle was not in essence about the Heidelberg Catechism, it was shown that the Catechism marked a significant moment in the development of this theological controversy. The Heidelberg Catechism was closely associated with the “outbreak” of the Liberal Struggle after J.J. Kotzé questioned the answer to question 60. Kotzé was eventually dismissed as a minister of the DRC because of his criticism of the Catechism. Kotzé challenged the DRC’s decision in the high court, and the court eventually ruled in his favour. This was an influential and much-discussed court case in the history of the DRC. The very fact that criticism of the Catechism (like that of Kotzé) could come to represent the outbreak of a theological dispute of this magnitude, reveals something of the weight of the mnemonic associations that were attached to the Catechism at the time. In the process, the Heidelberg Catechism became closely associated with the Liberal Struggle in the memory of the DRC, and reinforced as an identity marker.

One can argue that the Catechism became a site of struggle during the Liberal Struggle, causing a division between those who supported Kotzé and those who supported his dismissal. As a site of struggle, the Heidelberg Catechism in the context of the Liberal Struggle facilitated the development of beleaguered identities in the DRC, with both sides of the conflict perceiving itself as being besieged. Both sides viewed itself as fighting on the *side* of the Catechism (or the Confessions in general), and the conflict was even portrayed as a cosmic and holy battle.

As a site of struggle, the Heidelberg Catechism serves as a good example of the battle for control that accompanies commemoration. The arguments between the liberals and the orthodox demonstrate the struggle for control of the ideas, beliefs and sentiments that the Catechism was said to represent. What the orthodox saw as a violation of the Protestant identity of the DRC, the liberals viewed as enquiries and debates that constituted the heart of Protestantism. Conversely, what the orthodox saw as obedience to its calling, the liberals depicted as propagation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of infallibility. Despite the divergence of these arguments, all were made in the name of continuity with the tradition, and with reverence for the Catechism.

The Catechism thus served as an identity marker for both sides of the conflict. Both the orthodox and the liberal parties found their security in the Protestant past from which the Heidelberg Catechism was born, and based their arguments on this tradition. In addition to this, both parties believed that how the Catechism was employed was central to the preservation of their identity.

I have identified a tension between the *goods* that constitute a tradition and the *way* in which a tradition is transmitted. Or in the words of a text of the time: there was a tension between “de goede pand” and “bewaar.” Both the orthodox and the liberals accepted the Heidelberg Catechism as a given and a certainty within the Reformed tradition. However, they differed on how this tradition ought to be faithfully and successfully handed down and applied. *How* the Catechism ought to be *applied* became as important and self-evident as the Catechism itself. This, one might say, reveals a specific understanding of tradition: both parties saw tradition as something static, factual and timeless, as opposed to something dynamic, argumentative and contextual.

It was also argued that the Catechism was remembered as solving the conflict of the Liberal Struggle. Although this solution cannot be said to extend to the theological aspect of the conflict, it can be argued that the Catechism solved the ecclesial conflict – or at least that it was remembered to do so (as became particularly evident during the Du Plessis case). The tension and division within the DRC was dissolved by distilling complex theological differences to a matter of confessional allegiance as controlled by the subscription formula.

In these concluding remarks, I would dare to argue that this application of the Heidelberg Catechism could be read as a ritualised act of commemoration. The Catechism’s embodiment in the DRC was defined by the subscription formula, and signing this formula was indeed an institutionalised (or, one could say, ritualised) procedure. The subscription formula added a legal meaning to the Heidelberg Catechism, and contributed to giving it a rigid and fixed form within the DRC. In the same way that rituals provide us with fixed and distilled versions of the past, the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC became a distilled version of a 16<sup>th</sup> century theological document. In this version, it had the power to clearly define and police borders of identity.

Chapter 3 focused mainly on the Du Plessis case and the role that memories of the Confessions played in it. A significant aspect of the Du Plessis case was the extent to which it was mapped onto the Liberal Struggle. The Du Plessis case was perceived as a repetition of the Liberal Struggle, and the Liberal Struggle was seen as something worthy of imitation. As I have shown, the DRC predominantly remembered the Liberal Struggle as

being settled in favour of the party that saw itself as the defenders and representatives of Reformed Orthodoxy. In the historiography of the DRC, it became a watershed episode in which the church remained faithful to her heritage and Lord. In addition to this, it also became an example of God's grace and blessing towards the church. It was remembered as a proud victory and as such it became an example to be followed and repeated.

The role of a shared mnemonic framework in the sense-making strategies of a group, even when consisting of opposing subgroups, can be seen in the tug-of-war about the memory of Andrew Murray. Memories of Murray were presented time and again to strengthen some or other position during the Du Plessis case. Indicating continuity with Andrew Murray was a way to legitimate one's own position.

Many of the claims and counterclaims to the true Protestant identity during the Du Plessis case mirror a pattern that was also pointed out in the discussion about the Liberal Struggle: opposing groups found themselves equally attached to a shared past and drew on the same historical sources to legitimate their identity. Whereas in the Liberal Struggle continuity with the Reformation and the Synod of Dordt seemed to have been the historical anchors, the Du Plessis case saw the Liberal Struggle itself being made into a historical pillar of DRC identity. As has been pointed out, these anchors found particular embodiment in the figures of N.J. Hofmeyr and Andrew Murray.

In short then, we can say that in the Liberal Struggle the Confessions were primarily anchored in memories of the Reformation, but that in the Du Plessis case the Confessions were anchored in the memories of the Liberal Struggle. The meaning and interpretation of the Confessions were to be looked for in the DRC's recent history.

The mapping of one period onto another is an important feature of a group's collective memory. As Gardner puts it, this shows "that memory is not simply an ever-expanding mental receptacle for all that we have experienced... but also the medium through which we actively reflect upon and order these things" (Gardner 2010: 100-101). Collective memory provides groups with a mental framework of which to make sense of the world. As such, sense-making abilities are enabled but also limited by the groups to which we belong and with which we share mnemonic frameworks. Our thoughts and feelings originate within these "affective communities" and are "reorganised and reconstructed" by it (Misztal, 2003: 53). Memory guides our perception of the world in particular directions.

The memory of the Liberal Struggle provided the DRC with exactly this type of framework. The prominence of this framework is particularly evident in the way the DRC framed the Du Plessis case as a "known battle."

We can, furthermore, argue that during the Du Plessis case, the Heidelberg Catechism was a site of perplexity. The DRC faced difficult questions about the implication of scientific progress for faith and tradition, and the need for confessional revision. These questions gave rise to a tension between preservation and transformation as possible ways of relating to one's tradition, and this tension was hard to navigate and solve. Moreover, following the arguments of the time, it was shown that it is not easy to draw clear distinctions between these supposedly opposing sides. Agents arguing for change did not always implement change, whereas those protesting against change in the name of faithfulness to the tradition contributed to new understandings and applications of the tradition. This was nevertheless done under the banner of preservation, which became a leading motif in the DRC's identity construction – specifically relating to the Confessions. Preservation, as motif, was also already embedded in the memory frameworks formed through the memory of the Liberal Struggle. Preservation, we can argue, became an important characteristic of the Confessions as a site of memory.

Following Olivier (1990: 259), I have argued that the Du Plessis case was concluded without addressing the theological issues at the heart of the conflict, and, moreover, that this was harmful to the DRC. Lategan (2007) and Nash (1997) argue that Du Plessis' expulsion from the Stellenbosch Seminary was the definitive event that led to the wane of critical thought in the Seminary. Elphick, quoting Kinghorn, argues that the most ominous legacy of the Du Plessis case "was a stifling of biblical hermeneutics in the DRC, leaving it vulnerable to some deeply self-interested biblical interpretations in the apartheid era" (Elphick, 2012: 162). Hennie Rossouw summarised the DRC in the aftermath of the Du Plessis case as being characterised by an antithetical spirit of "introverted closedness" and "belligerent exclusivism" (Rossouw, 2000: 14).

These tensions between unity and diversity, durability and change, and preservation and transformation are a persistent feature in the collective memory of a group. The strength of a group is determined by how it can manage these opposites for the sake of continuity in time.

There is an important distinction between the strength of a group and the strength of a tradition that ought to be mentioned here. There is no doubt that the DRC survived the Du Plessis case as a strong group. This endurance was established by way of memory. However, one can argue that the conflict in the DRC was not solved theologically but mnemonically. The DRC managed to establish convincing historical continuity with the Reformed tradition, and this memory-based identity became its theological and ecclesial identity.



As to the strength of a tradition, the Du Plessis case can be said to have been an epistemological crisis for the DRC. However, by primarily solving the crisis mnemonically it did not meet the conditions set out by MacIntyre for overcoming an epistemological crisis:

[In an epistemological crisis] there seem[s] to be insufficient resources within the established fabric of belief to respond to the crisis, resulting in the dissolution of historically-founded certitudes... How traditions respond to an epistemological crisis determines whether they will attain intellectual maturity. Inventiveness is required, and new concepts invented to address it must satisfy three requirements. First, the new and conceptually enriched scheme must furnish a solution to problems previously deemed intractable. Second, an explanation must be provided of what rendered the tradition sterile and/or incoherent. Third, these tasks must be carried out in a way that exhibits fundamental continuity with the shared beliefs of the past... Traditions are thus, according to MacIntyre, vindicated or not vindicated through their response to epistemological crises." (Vosloo, 2010a: 26-27, 28)

The DRC's mnemonic solution to the Du Plessis case prevented it from developing much-needed intellectual maturity. Instead, it developed an "introverted closedness" and a "belligerent exclusivism", as Hennie Rossouw remarked. This was not, I would argue, the result of a mnemonic solution per se, but the result of the *specific* mnemonic solution that the DRC put forward. As will be pointed out in the discussion of chapter 4 below, being faithful to the Confessions came to imply uniformity, univocity and strict loyalty to one's own group.

Chapter 4 demonstrated the role of collective memory in helping a community deal with change. The study has shown that, despite the DRC's emphasis on preservation, stability and sameness, it underwent a lot of change in the 1930s and 1940s. This was a time characterised by a big concern about Afrikaner poverty amid the Great Depression of the 1930s, increasing urbanisation, supposedly widespread moral degeneration, the Second World War, growing concerns about race relations in South Africa, and general political polarisation among white South Africans.

Amid these challenges and difficulties, the DRC managed to inspire its members to rise to the challenges. Historical narratives that showed the DRC's continuity with a worthy past played a significant role in constructing its identity amid change. The sameness with the past provided a much-needed point of stability and orientation.

Two main strategies were identified through which the DRC created stability and orientation for herself. The first strategy was to draw on the Confessions and to actively

define herself as a confessional church. The DRC was said to be enjoying a “newly awakened confessional consciousness”, and the Confessions were depicted as a rock amid raging storms and presented as an antidote to the time of supposed turmoil and disruption.

For the DRC, being a confessional church meant that they were in continuity with the early church, and also in continuity with the Reformation. In addition to confirming its identity in this twofold way, the intertwinement between the Afrikaners and the DRC was emphasised to underscore the role of a strong commitment to the Confessions in the shaping of a people. This meant that the confessional church was at the same time also a *volkskerk* – a very clear example showing that individuals belong to more than one group at a time and how memories travel between groups. Historical continuity by way of the Confessions, then, was harnessed not only to legitimate the DRC but also to sanction the Afrikaners as a group.

With this tight link between the DRC and her people on the one hand and the Confessions on the other intact, the Confessions were used to define the nature of the community in more specific terms, too. For the DRC, being a confessional church meant being a community with no room for ambiguity or differences of opinion. The Confessions were presented as an antidote to strife and a guarantee of peace and love within the church. Unanimity was said to be a core characteristic of the confessional church, and subscribing to the confessions supposed one’s submission to this unanimity. Other characteristics of a confessional church were said to be stability, rigidity, like-mindedness, unity, order and clear and definite boundaries.

The DRC’s own understanding of its calling was expressed in similar terms: to be a “pillar of steadfastness”, to avoid “those who deviate from the church’s teaching”, to uphold “the Word of God against all adversaries”, and to safeguard “the purity of the Confession” at all times. Moreover, the unambiguous link between the Bible and the Confessions articulated in the subscription formula, implied that the confessional church was by definition firmly and correctly rooted in the Bible.

In defining herself as a confessional church, the DRC favoured separation and isolation in fear of contamination, and emphasised that which is “one’s own” and the right “to be oneself”. The new found *urge* and *right* of the DRC to confess and to “be ourselves” was seen as an awakening and realisation of its calling. The DRC’s act of separation and isolation can thus be said to have sprouted from the concern with self-preservation: an emphasis on loyalty to the own, taking care of one’s own, and the enforcement of boundaries.

The second strategy through which the DRC created stability and orientation was through the (re)discovery of her own history and an emphasis on heritage. Historical narratives that showed the DRC's continuity with a worthy past played a significant role in constructing its identity amid change. Different historical narratives were intertwined to become one rich resource for the DRC from which to draw, and gave rise to a surplus of meaning.

Looking at the historical narratives in which the DRC grounded herself, and in which the Confessions were incorporated, we saw that they have the following characteristics: they are filled with stories of martyrdom and persecution (stories told in bloody terms), and with heroes that defended the church and her heritage despite difficulties. These heroes and their actions are further remembered as constituting the rock that is the DRC's past. It provided the DRC with an unwavering and solid past worthy of imitation. The wide variety of things constituting this heritage (including Confessions, farms, church buildings and virtues) had to be defended, and if needed, sacrifices had to be made for them.

At the same time, however, heritage was in a metaphorical way depicted as an apt weapon with which to defend oneself. The need to defend themselves was pertinent because of the DRC's self-understanding: they were besieged and beleaguered, and their core identity needed to be fortified. However, this idea of being besieged together with a confirmation of its rock-solid past, created a springboard for engaging with the future. The affirmation of a meaningful and God-willed past was seen as a promise of a meaningful future.

Holding onto what it regarded as an unchanging heritage, the DRC orchestrated and sustained considerable transformations in various spheres of its existence. The solidity associated with its heritage served both as a guarantee of its security and as a call to build on what it had. Apart from the bravery, pugnacity, and loyalty of the *fathers* continuously highlighted in the historical narratives, their *actions* were also emphasised. Loyalty to one's heritage was also understood as a call to concrete action. Together with a deep trust in "the God of our fathers", the heritage handed down to them and the comfort it provided, there was also the belief that the DRC's survival depended (at least partly) on itself.

It is clear from the discussion above that the two strategies through which the DRC as a group created stability and orientation for itself consist of a lot more than memories of the Heidelberg Catechism. To understand these strategies nevertheless makes a meaningful contribution to one's understanding of the Heidelberg Catechism in the DRC's collective memory. It puts the Heidelberg Catechism into perspective. Despite the DRC's persistence in defining itself as a confessional church, it was not the memories of the

Heidelberg Catechism or any of the other Confessions that were most preeminent. The Heidelberg Catechism was simply one among many sites of memory on which the DRC drew to orient and steady itself.

In addition, Chapter 4 shows just how robust a site of memory can be, and the extent to which a group can add new meanings to it. In the chapter, *confessions* stand out as such a robust site – becoming an encompassing *holder* of all kinds of historical narratives, ideas, hopes and attributes.

As Halbwachs would argue, the DRC created a portrait of itself that unfolded in time. By presenting the Confessions as the central aspect of its identity, the DRC managed to colour it with all kinds of other narratives through which it not only linked itself to the Afrikaner community, but also to the Reformation and even the early church. This narrative allowed the group to recognise itself in a variety of (historical) circumstances and events that provided them with stability and a sense of direction. As Misztal argues, “[m]emory is formed in relation to something experienced as stable, and in turn it adds to this stability” (2003: 51). By recognising itself in the stories of the Reformation, the Confessions, the *Voortrekkers* and the Liberal Struggle, it claimed the virtues and characteristics of these stories and their heroes for itself. These narratives conflated different concepts like “confessional”, “Calvinist”, “Protestant” and “Reformed” to the extent that they functioned as synonyms and shorthand whenever the “purest” Reformed truth (as ultimately expressed in the Confessions) had to be indicated.

If the Confessions are representative of and associated with Protestant and Christian history as told by the DRC at the time (including their own part in this history), it makes for a very influential and emotion-laden ecclesial basis. This professedly confessional basis represented very specific loyalties, virtues (including suggestions of how they ought to be embodied) and ideals. As such these stories also informed the future. Faith and heritage were the resources and the vision that guided their calling to build a specific future. The continuous call to remember and savour the heritage was therefore an important substructure of the DRC’s actions. The past, present and future became intimately and directly connected.

Chapter 5 investigated and explicated the close link between commemoration and identity. In the years following the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938, the DRC was struck by what may be called commemorative fever. Historical narratives became ritualised and incorporated into a commemorative calendar, and expressing specific memories and hopes became a habit. The growing importance of heritage and commemoration was also reflected in the formal concern with the history and historiography of the Afrikaner people and the DRC. This *urge* to commemorate and honour the past was depicted as a “natural” occurrence, and similarly the rise of interest

in history was said to be spontaneous. This went hand in hand with a concern about *how* exactly the past had to be commemorated. The DRC's wellbeing was seen to be connected to its memory.

Although this commemorative fever was not only true of the DRC but also of the wider Afrikaner community (and again shows the overlap between these two groups), the DRC had a particular concern with recognising the religious aspects of the past – another example of the battle for control that accompanies commemoration. This led to the sacralisation of certain events, figures and symbols. Various examples of this can be mentioned: the way in which the wagons of the symbolic trek of 1938 were remembered as “apostles of love and tolerance” and “sermon carriers”; the hope that was expressed that the Voortrekker Monument would serve as a *volksaltaar*; depicting Jan van Riebeeck as an exemplary religious figure; seeing the Day of the Vow as the anchor of the *volk*'s religiosity. For them, the sacred nature of the past meant that it was transposed to a supposedly timeless reality.

What is notable about the historical continuities that were construed is the equal emphasis on continuity with the Reformation and continuity with the *volk*. Loyalty to the *volk* and loyalty to the Reformed heritage (particularly the Reformed Confessions) were put on the same level. This influenced the DRC's commemorative calendar. The Christian calendar was merged with the *volk*'s calendar, leading to an uncritical fusion between faithfulness to the Reformed theology and loyalty to the Afrikaner *volk*.

These commemorative rituals of the DRC are good examples of what Connerton would call an overlap of “recollection and bodies” (Connerton, 1989: 135). For him this overlap constitutes a powerful moment: a heroic communal past is not only evoked, but people's participation in it is organised. Moreover, this participation is performative and hence habitual (158). As such it includes a notion of bodily automatisms (158). Specific people are called to gather at specific times and places, to commemorate and celebrate in specific ways, and to hope for specific things. It is more often than not a very real and emotion-laden *representation* of “mythic events”, and participants embody this ceremonially.

Connerton also emphasises that rites are not limited in their effect to the ritual occasion (Connerton, 1989: 933). Whatever is demonstrated in rites permeates also non-ritual behaviour and mentality. Although demarcated in time and space, rites are also porous. They are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with respect to a set of further non-ritual actions, to a community's entire life. Rites have the capacity to give value and meaning to the life of those who perform them (974). Through acts performed at a sacred site, the illusion of mundane time is suspended (951). These sites become

places where temporal distance is denied and the existence of “the same”, “the true” and “authentic” reality is repeatedly disclosed (935). Accordingly, I have argued that the DRC’s imagination, rationality and sense of justice and community were shaped by the enactment of their memories.

Misztal sees ritualised commemoration as a colonisation of time and space (2003: 52): a group can thereby create a new reality for itself to live in, as it arranges events into a specific sequence that repeats. How these events are positioned in relation to each other, provide them with additional meaning (as was seen in the DRC’s interpretation of the fact that Pentecost and Van Riebeeck Day were celebrated close to each other on the calendar). As was the case with the DRC, only specific people attended these commemorations and they also did so at specific places. This means that a distilled version of the past (presented by the ritual) is re-enacted by a distilled version of society. This creates reality, and an illusion of timelessness and continuity. It also creates social relations, beliefs, hopes and a community’s understanding of its own place and calling in the world – a framework for making sense of the world.

Observing the various elements that constituted the DRC’s commemorative calendar puts the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory in a certain perspective, once again.

Compared to the enthusiasm about history and commemoration in general, the 400-year commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1963 stands as a non-event. Memories of the Catechism in this period are generally characterised by a lament of the lack of interest in the Catechism that was observed. It seems as if the Heidelberg Catechism as an active site of memory was largely overpowered by other commemorative events.

Through Sunday afternoon sermons, the ritualised embodiment of the Heidelberg Catechism preceded all the other, much *newer* commemorations discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, this ritual was firmly institutionalised by way of the Church Order. Nevertheless, both Catechism preaching and the 400<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism can be said to have been neglected when compared to the fervent way with which other commemorations at the time were celebrated.

When compared to the enthusiasm with which Pentecost services were anticipated, for example, the liturgical embodiment of the Heidelberg Catechism seems to have fallen short of stirring emotions. Outside of theological conflict, it is primarily remembered as practised with dryness and cold rationalism. Moreover, the most prominent and discussed characteristic of Catechism preaching was its decline and neglect.

The fact that this loss was so persistently bemoaned in the DRC is not insignificant. It does not show the negligibility of the Catechism in the collective memory of the DRC, but rather

its tenacity. Even though it was neglected – almost abandoned – as an active place of remembering, it endured. I would argue that *site of forgetting* (rather than site of memory) is a more fitting way of seeing it. As such, the Heidelberg Catechism – together with the Belgic Confessions and the Canons of Dordt – became vulnerable and at risk of being the hostage of cultural liturgies and imaginations.

The DRC's unification process in 1962, I argued, was an event influenced by the reality created by their commemorations. While the theological grounding of the DRC's unification was in its shared confessional basis, the motivation for unification lay elsewhere. Although in essence founded on a church order with the Confessions at its centre, the DRC's social imagination was shaped by its Afrikaner-centered commemorative calendar to such an extent that the borders of the Afrikaner community also became the borders of the church community. Specific historical narratives combined with a packed commemoration calendar were instrumental in shaping the DRC's vision for society. It also impacted the DRC's biblical hermeneutical lens. Following Connerton, we can argue that the DRC's experience of the world was informed by their knowledge of the past. Their images of the past created and legitimated a specific social order. The drive to unify was not based on a theological conviction, but on an experience of the world fuelled by their social imagination.

### 6.3. Concluding remarks

From the above overview, it is evident that the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory played an important role as a source of identity in the DRC between 1862 and 1963. Nevertheless, its entanglement with other sites of memories has also been apparent and shows the complex and rich nature of a community's mnemonic frameworks. To study the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory was undoubtedly a fruitful lens through which to look at the DRC's collective memory.

Nonetheless, one rightful critique of the study is its failure to use sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism as primary sources to be analysed. Examining sermons preached during this period would certainly add value to this analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory, particularly given the study's emphasis on ritualised and embodied memory. However, given the relative shortage of academic research about sites of memory of the DRC so far, I found it necessary to also understand and sketch the DRC's larger mnemonic environment in which the Heidelberg Catechism functioned. In my opinion, to appreciate the Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory in the DRC it needs to be understood in relation to other sites of memories.



Given the rich amount of Catechism sermons available, I would argue that if my study primarily focused on sermons, the conclusions reached might have been quite different from what I have concluded in this study. Due to the relatively long period covered in the study, I had to make certain decisions about the sources to be included and did not consider it feasible to include sermons.

Another admitted shortcoming of the study is a certain lack of nuance with which it typifies the DRC as a community. A critical reader will note that I often refer to the DRC as if it is a homogeneous community whose identity at a specific point in time can be expressed in singular terms. I am duly aware of the problems that this might create, and of the fact that the DRC consisted of a multiplicity of voices who were not all present in the sources I used. The need for this type of *shorthand* when referring to the DRC, once again, sprung from the vast period covered in the study and the decision to provide a broader analysis rather than a narrower and deeper one.

The results of the study also raise certain questions for further exploration. In conclusion, I will mention two questions I find particularly intriguing.

One aspect of analysing memories of the Heidelberg Catechism I found surprising is the various metaphors that were used and reused over time. The Catechism was called a “goede pand”, a rock amid raging storms, a bulwark and a weapon, among other things. The tactility of these metaphors, I would argue, adds to the *stickiness* of memories. It also provides memories of something abstract, like a confessional document, with narrative potential. In the light of the DRC’s surge of interest in its own history from the 1930s onwards, the interplay between memory, history and metaphor in the development of a community’s collective memory asks for closer analysis.

The second intriguing question I want to raise deals with the dynamic between the theological, ecclesiological and historical aspects of confessions. I have argued that commemorative rituals played a defining role in shaping the DRC’s imagination, rationality and sense of justice and community. These commemorative rituals, we have seen, were deduced from a rich resource of historical narratives that were present in the DRC. Confessions seemed to have become the hostage of cultural liturgies and imagination in the DRC during this time. If a group’s sense-making framework is shaped by memory and ritual, what is the implication of the relationship between theological hermeneutics and liturgy for contemporary Reformed communities?

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